

THOMAS ERSKINE OF LINLATHEN
His life and theology 1788 - 1837

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Summary

Thomas Erskine of Linlathen (1788 - 1870) was an outstanding Scottish lay theologian who combined the roles of leisurely laird and theological author and correspondent. He was brought up as an Episcopalian, but in adult life his connections were mainly with the Church of Scotland and Scottish Congregationalism. Theologically, Erskine travelled from an initial moderate Calvinism of the "moral government" variety, through Irvingism, to a final, though far from easy-going, Universalism. His first book, Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion (1820), argued that Christianity's truth was demonstrated by its correspondence with man's moral and spiritual needs. It was well received by the orthodox world. His Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel (1828), however, provoked a storm of criticism for its advocacy of a doctrine of universal atonement and pardon. In 1828 Erskine met John McLeod Campbell of Row, and enthusiastically supported him during his trial and deposition from the Church of Scotland. Erskine himself became the principal target of orthodox criticism during the "Row controversy" of 1828 - 31. He and Campbell became lifelong friends. Campbell's mature Christology is seminally present in Erskine's Brazen Serpent (1831). Erskine also encountered Edward Irving at this period, and adopted his views on Christ's fallen humanity and the gifts of the Spirit. His support for the Irvingite charismatic movement, however, underwent a crisis in 1833 - 4, and he abandoned it as delusive. The Doctrine of Election (1837) concluded Erskine's breach with Calvinism.

Erskine's thought shows increasing preoccupation with conscience as the criterion of truth. He came to regard God as a universal Father who is educating all men into

a filial relationship with Himself through the indwelling of Christ in the human race, and in later years he saw the ultimate salvation of all as the quintessential gospel.

Erskine presents us with a fascinating study in the decline of Calvinism in an individual's life and provides a micro-cosmic glimpse of that process as it was to affect Scotland in general in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

I hereby affirm that I have composed this thesis, that it is a record of work done by myself, and that it has not been previously accepted for a higher degree.

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Preliminary note

The following abbreviations have been frequently employed:

DNB - Dictionary of National Biography

Reminiscences and Reflections - Reminiscences and Reflections referring to his early ministry in the Parish of Row, 1825 - 31. By John McLeod Campbell.

Election - The Doctrine of Election, and its connection with the general tenor of Christianity, illustrated from many parts of Scripture, and especially from the epistle to the Romans. By Thomas Erskine.

Extracts - Extracts of Letters to a Christian Friend from a Lady. With introductory essay by Thomas Erskine.

Freeness - The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel. By Thomas Erskine.

Remarks - Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion. By Thomas Erskine.

Letters - Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen. 2 vols. Edited by William Hanna.

Memoirs of Chalmers - Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Chalmers. 4 vols. By William Hanna.

Quotations from the Bible, when made by Erskine and his contemporaries, are from the Authorised Version (King James Version). When I have quoted from the Bible myself to make a theological point, I have used the New American Standard Version.

INTRODUCTION

If an apology is needed for this survey of Thomas Erskine's early life and thought, consider the following statements:

Scotland, like England, was the scene of a theological awakening between 1820 and 1830, and in this movement the foremost figure is Thomas Erskine of Linlathen (1788 - 1870).¹

Quick as was the pace of thought in England between the years 1820 and 1830, it was hardly less so in Scotland. Thomas Erskine began his career as a religious writer in 1820; and the more his writings are studied the more remarkable will be found to have been their influence.²

The most significant figure in Scottish theological thought in the quarter of a century preceding the Disruption - and perhaps in the nineteenth century - was a layman, Thomas Erskine of Linlathen ... Scotland has never given Erskine the attention he deserves, and his books, especially The Brazen Serpent, are now almost unobtainable.³

Along with Coleridge, Erskine of Linlathen (AD 1788 - 1870) was instrumental in the regeneration of British theology in the nineteenth century.⁴

Alongside these judgments, however, we must immediately set the following two caveats:

Should anyone attempt to write the life of Mr. Erskine, the difficulty must ever present itself to him that what he has to depict is spirit and not matter, that he has to convey light, to represent sound - an almost insuperable difficulty. Perhaps it can only in a measure be overcome by giving his very words, his thoughts, as they came fresh from his heart ...⁵

Bishop Ewing's words are reinforced by a letter he received from John McLeod Campbell a few months after Erskine's death:

No man is able to say to those who knew him not what he was; no man could say this to those who knew him

in a way that they will feel satisfying.⁶

These comments, by two of Erskine's closest friends, seem to doom from the outset any attempt to retell Erskine's life. Indeed, there is a sense in which it is not the purpose of this thesis to retell it. Erskine the man is gone for ever, and no amount of research or imagination is likely to recreate for us a century later "the real and living Erskine, the light which shone from and transfigured his countenance, the music and tenderness which flowed from his voice!"⁷ But what can be studied with profit is Erskine's life in relation to his theology - his theological development, from an initial Evangelical Calvinism, through Irvingism, to a final, though far from easy-going, Universalism. A large portion of this story is concentrated in the third decade of the nineteenth century, as indicated in the opening quotations, flowing into the same channel which bore the so-called Row controversy with which the name of McLeod Campbell is associated, and its exotic offshoot, the Catholic Apostolic Church, whose figurehead was the flamboyant Edward Irving. Of the endeavour to retell this story Bishop Ewing would certainly have approved:

It is very desirable that some fuller history of that period should be given than any which has yet appeared, which should embrace both a narrative of the time and its actors, and fully set forth the principles which were at stake.⁸

This is what I have tried to do: to trace the lines of Erskine's doctrinal development, and in so doing to look afresh at the two contentious movements in which he himself played no insignificant part. Most of the substance of this thesis will accordingly be devoted to examining Erskine's writings, the last of which to be published in his lifetime came out in 1837. I have glanced beyond that date in the final section for the sake of completion, since Erskine's definite espousal of Universalism seems not to have taken place till 1839.

The reader will find relatively little attention given to the personal details of Erskine's life. It is interesting to know that he administered homeopathic medicine to his cows, for instance, but it adds nothing to our understanding of his theology⁹. Those who wish to sample this aspect of Erskine should peruse William Hanna's admirable two-volume collection of his letters. Nor, on a broader canvas, will too much time be devoted to the general history and culture of the day, except insofar as these may illustrate Erskine's particular thread of life. It is interesting to know that the Burke and Hare murders took place in Edinburgh in 1828, the same year that Erskine's most controversial book, The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel, was published, but again it scarcely adds to our understanding of his theological development.¹⁰

It is the fact of that development which first drew me to Erskine, and which constitutes for me his abiding significance. How and why does a Calvinist, living in one of the most Calvinistic nations on earth, cease to be a Calvinist and end up as a classic Victorian theological Liberal? Perhaps this question will have genuine interest only for Calvinists, or those who have abandoned Calvinism as Erskine did. I was attracted to Erskine from the first of these standpoints, although not without some sympathies for the second. Calvinism, at least in a temperate form, has seemed to me for a good number of years now to be the most satisfying interpretation of the Bible and of Christian experience; but there have been times when I have not been immune from the kind of doubts and difficulties which Erskine felt - about substitutionary and limited atonement, human depravity, personal election, and the justice and love of God in relation to these. Unlike Erskine, however, I have found myself always returning to the Augustinian or Calvinistic understanding of Christianity as in the last resort fundamentally right and true and reasonable. It is as well for the reader to know where I stand

on these matters, that he may be able to appreciate my criteria of judgment and detect the possible workings of my prejudices.

But what is Calvinism? What did Erskine reject in rejecting it?

The distinctive doctrines of Calvinism are often summed up in the mnemonic TULIP. This stands for Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance: the "five points of Calvinism". We can illustrate these points from the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Total depravity: "Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto." (ch.9, par.3)

Unconditional election: "Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, hath chosen in Christ unto everlasting glory, out of His mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto; and all to the praise of His glorious grace." (ch.3, para.5)

Limited atonement: "To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, He doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same ..." "Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only." (ch.8, para.8; ch.3, para.6).

Irresistible grace: "All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed and accepted

time, effectually to call, by His word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by His almighty power determining them to that which is good; and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace." (ch.10, para 1).

Perseverance: "They whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved." (ch.17, para 1).

The theology of the Westminster Confession was the official theology of the established Church of Scotland in Erskine's day, as well as of the various dissenting Presbyterian bodies. It was also by and large the theology of Scottish Baptists and Congregationalists. It was, in short, the prevailing theology of Scottish Protestantism, with the exception of the Episcopalians. I shall refer to this theology as "Calvinistic orthodoxy", or simply "orthodoxy".

Erskine's impetus in his drift from Calvinism came from his wish to emphasise the wider significance of God's love, which in Scottish Calvinism could so often be apprehended almost exclusively in relation to the elect. Dr. Andrew Thomson, for instance, leader of the Evangelical party in the Kirk until his death in 1831, quoted ROM.8:32 - "He Who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" - to prove that the sinners God loves are loved with an effectively salvific love which does not stop short of their actual salvation. God's love cannot be severed from His sovereign omnipotence, insisted Thomson, so that the ultimately unsaved

are on this argument the unloved.¹¹ Similarly, John Smyth of Glasgow roundly denied that there was in God a love to all men. For Smyth, "if His affection is universal, there cannot be an election according to grace."¹² Dr. William Hamilton of Strathblane denied God's global love in a series of rhetorical questions:

But because He has sent His Son to our guilty globe, does it follow that He has a love for all its inhabitants? ... If ... God had an indiscriminate affection for the whole, it would be reasonable to expect that His conduct would be precisely the same to all ... if God had the same affection for all, why is His conduct towards them so dissimilar? and their eternal condition so wonderfully different? Why is one taken and another left? Why are some exalted to heaven, and others cast down to hell? Why does He say, Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated? ... no proof of such an indiscriminate affection can be discerned. After all we are obliged to return to the obnoxious, but precious truth: The salvation of men originates in the good pleasure of the God of love ... His affection for any soul, ensures all that is requisite for its present faith and final safety.¹³

This emphasis, one would wish to say, should not be taken as definitive of Calvinism. It is perfectly possible to hold to God's special love in election without denying that He truly loves all men in a more general way, even desiring their salvation.¹⁴ In the Scotland of Erskine's day, the so-called "moderate Calvinists" would have held this position (although denounced by stricter Calvinists for their peculiar views of the atonement), and it was with these men that Erskine originally associated. Unfortunately a more narrow conception of Calvinism of the Thomson-Smyth-Hamilton type seems to have prevailed in Scotland in the first part of the nineteenth century, and it was against this that Erskine fought. His reaction, one may well think, went too far.

Scottish Protestantism at large was to undergo the same reaction in the latter part of the century, for the same basic reason, viz. a desire to articulate more clearly God's grace in relation to all His creatures, to humanity as a whole.¹⁵ Into that story we cannot here enter, but it is worth noting that Erskine was one of the pioneers of this movement, along with McLeod Campbell, Alexander Scott and James Morison. As a notice in the Contemporary Review in May 1870, soon after Erskine's death, said of him, "How high must that peak have been which caught the light so early!"¹⁶

Erskine's interest, then, lies not only in his fascinating personal history as a case study in the decline of Calvinism, but also as a precursor of things to come.

Someone already familiar with Scottish church history in this epoch may wonder why I have made no reference to the Moderate party in the Kirk. Were they not hostile to Calvinism? Could the mature Erskine not be seen simply as a neo-Moderate?

The truth is that the identification of Moderatism with anti-Calvinism in this period seems to be a substantially unsound equation. George Hill, Professor of Divinity at St. Andrews and leader of the Moderates until his death in 1819, was Calvinistic in his theology; his Lectures in Divinity were employed by Thomas Chalmers, Professor of Divinity at Edinburgh from 1828 and leader of the Evangelicals from 1831, as his preferred dogmatics textbook in theology classes.¹⁷ R.H. Story summed up the relation between Moderates and Evangelicals thus:

They [Moderates] laboured in their pulpit ministrations to enforce the morality of the Gospel. They were urged to this by seeing how greatly it was disregarded by all classes. Perhaps they erred in dwelling too frequently upon such themes and in not pressing them upon their hearers by the considerations arising from the doctrines of grace.

But even this could only be said of a limited number: it cannot be asserted of the leaders of the party, nor even of the great majority of its rank and file. When sweeping assertions of so unwarranted a character are made against the clergy of the Moderate school, the tables might easily be turned, and it might with equal truth be said that there were cases in which the doctrines of grace were proclaimed, while their effect as productive of Christian fruit was too much overlooked. Burns' famous satire has without doubt a foundation in fact. But any such recrimination would be as unfair to the Evangelical party as are the counter-allegations regarding the Moderate school. The truth is that while there were instances of defective teaching and of defective living amongst the adherents of both the great parties in the Scottish Church, the great majority of both parties were worthy representatives of their sacred profession, and did good service to the country and to the cause of religion.¹⁸

The real difference between Moderates and Evangelicals (at least in our period) seems to have been one of spirit and ethos. Moderates emphasised culture and morality, Evangelicals stressed theology and spiritual conversion; or, as McLeod Campbell put it, the motto of the one was "Works", that of the other, "Faith", although Campbell was quick to add that this did not mean that Moderates had no faith or that Evangelicals were not interested in works.¹⁹ Again, Toryism and a correspondingly Tory attitude to the Church, seeing it as a legal entity, typified the Moderates; Whiggism and a more ecclesiastical and independent view of the Church typified Evangelicals.²⁰ From this sprang the Ten Years' Conflict of 1833 - 43 over the clerical patronage rights of landowners, which resulted in the departure of most Evangelicals from the Kirk in order to secure what they felt was the Scriptural right of congregations to choose their own ministers. But both parties upheld the Westminster Confession as the Kirk's subordinate standard of faith (after the Bible), even if Moderates did so more out of traditional loyalty to the constitution of the Kirk than from a vibrant sense of the

Confession's theological truth. It was, after all, two Moderates who proposed and seconded the deposition of Alexander Scott in the General Assembly of 1831, when he dared to question the harmony of the Westminster Confession with the Bible.²¹

But Thomas Erskine would have abhorred any kind of adherence to a theology which did not flow out of a deep, personal, experimental persuasion of its truth. His original spiritual home was quite naturally among Evangelicals and Calvinists, with their grand motifs of personal faith and authentic spiritual experience. The process by which he journeyed from this basis into the Romantic Liberalism of the nineteenth century is the story we now propose to tell.

I. EARLY YEARS, 1788 - 1816

(i) Ancestry and early life

Thomas Erskine of Linlathen was "sprung from a far-descended and gracious race".¹ His paternal grandfather was Professor John Erskine of Edinburgh University (1696 - 1768), son of the staunch Covenanter Colonel John Erskine of Carnock.² Professor Erskine, like his better known grandson, was a man of introspective temperament. Called to the bar in 1719, he practised as a lawyer for eighteen years, without much success, owing to his shyness, a feeble voice and constant ill-health. The year 1737, however, brought an upturn in his fortunes when he was appointed Professor of municipal law at Edinburgh University. His lecturing proved more effective than his pleading, and the Professor drew unprecedented numbers of students to his law classes until his retirement in 1765. Removing to his estate in Cardross, he worked there, until his death in 1768, on his Institutes of the Law of Scotland. This was a comprehensive exposition of Scotland's legal system which held its own for a century as a standard textbook on the subject.

Professor Erskine married twice. His first wife, a Miss Melville, neice to the Earl of Leven, gave birth in 1721 to an only child, named John. This John Erskine was to occupy a crucial place in the annals of Scottish Evangelicalism. The Professor's second marriage to a Miss Stirling produced two more sons, James and David, the latter of whom was the father of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen.

The Professor's first son and namesake was educated at Edinburgh University from 1733 - 43.³ Originally trained for the legal profession, a change of heart led him instead to enter the ministry of the Church of Scotland. This was against the wishes of the Professor and the rest of the family, and the

aspiring preacher was partly disinherited in consequence. Licensed to preach in 1743 and ordained to Kirkintilloch parish near Glasgow in 1744, John Erskine soon became one of the moving spirits of the Evangelical camp in the established Kirk. A stout Calvinist, he had been a warm admirer of George Whitefield from student days, and in 1742 had published a pamphlet defending the great revivalist preacher against his detractors. The pamphlet was entitled Signs of the Times. In it Erskine suggested that the revival might be a prelude to the Second Coming! His nephew Thomas was to make a similar eschatological error in eighty years' time. Was there perhaps an apocalyptic strain in the blood of the Erskines?

As a minister, John Erskine proved a good friend to the Calvinistic wing of the great spiritual awakening which was then sweeping across Britain. A contemporary described his character thus:

In his character were concentrated extensive learning; fervent piety; purity of doctrine; energy of sentiment; enlarged benevolence, uniformly animated by an ardent zeal for the glory⁴ of his Master and for the salvation of men.

Erskine does not himself seem to have been a particularly eloquent preacher, but he had "much learning, metaphysical acuteness and energy of argument", according to Walter Scott, who portrayed him sympathetically in his novel Guy Mannering.⁵

In 1753 Erskine moved to Culross; in 1758, to New Greyfriars, Edinburgh; in 1767, to Old Greyfriars, a collegiate charge, where his fellow minister was Dr. William Robertson of Edinburgh University, the distinguished historian, incomparable church court debater and arch-Moderate. In Sir Henry Moncrieff's apt words:

Two such men officiating together in the same congregation for six and twenty years can

scarcely be mentioned in the history of any other Church.⁶

By his preaching, literary output (he wrote twenty-five books or pamphlets and edited twenty others), church court activities and personal influence among the landed and legal aristocracy, Erskine contributed richly to the Evangelical cause in the Church of Scotland in the latter half of the eighteenth century. His social rank and erudition imparted an air of respectability to his Evangelicalism, prefiguring the period in the early nineteenth century when Evangelicalism became fashionable. He was also a precursor of the Disruption fathers in his opposition to patronage, and an early champion of the missionary movement.

Erskine married one Miss Christian Mackay in 1746. Nine sons and five daughters were born to them; the eldest daughter Mary married Charles Stuart of Dunearn, a good friend both of Thomas Chalmers and Thomas Erskine, who will appear again in these pages.

John Erskine possessed high views of blood kinship, and made a point of maintaining regular intercourse with his relations. He would doubtless have been on familiar terms with his younger brother David Erskine and his family, one of whose number was our own Thomas. Hanna pictures the future laird of Linlathen playing around his "venerable uncle" John's knees as an infant.⁷ Thomas would later refer to the old Evangelical chieftain as "my dear uncle Doctor Erskine", in a letter written at the age of fourteen.⁸ There was a resemblance between uncle and nephew: they each had a warm and lively piety, an aristocratic spirit, a wide epistolary correspondence, and a willingness to engage in controversy for what they saw as Scriptural truth. Thomas, however, was a layman of no fixed denomination, whereas John was a leading clergyman of the established Kirk; and in spite of two interesting coincidences respecting the Deistic controversy (in which

uncle and nephew both defended natural religion) and the doctrine of saving faith (both held Sandemanian views), we will see the theologies of the two Erskines becoming increasingly divergent.

John Erskine died peacefully in his bed in 1803, aged eighty-two. Thomas Erskine was then fourteen.

David Erskine, Professor Erskine's third son, followed his father into the legal profession, practising as a writer to the signet in Edinburgh. We know little of him; Sir Henry Moncrieff testified that he was "allowed by all competent judges to have been one of the ablest and most honourable men whom his profession produced."⁹ Success enabled him to purchase the country estate of Linlathen, near Dundee, which served as a home for himself and his wife Ann (nee Graham) whom he married in 1781.

Ann Erskine was the first daughter of Lady Graham of Airth, a high Episcopalian and staunch Jacobite who never prayed for the house of Hanover. Presiding over the romantic setting of Airth castle, which stood on a sharp ridge of sandstone in the riverside plain stretching from Falkirk to Stirling, Lady Graham confronts us with a startling departure from the pattern of true-blue Presbyterian piety exemplified in Thomas Erskine's paternal ancestors. While Presbyterian worship went on in the kirk just by the castle walls, within those walls the Graham family would have their own private service conducted from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. Since Thomas Erskine spent much of his boyhood in Airth castle, he would have attended these services quite frequently. Indeed, it can be fairly stated that he was brought up, religiously speaking, within the Episcopal fold.

This strong element of Episcopalianism in Erskine's childhood has sometimes been pressed into service to account for his

adult freedom from the constrictions of Calvinist orthodoxy.¹⁰ Hanna goes as far as to say that "Mr. Erskine was brought up as an Episcopalian and may be said to have continued so all his life."¹¹ This, however, is not borne out by the evidence. Erskine's settled tendency in later life was to attend the worship of the established Church of Scotland. Dean Stanley makes this clear in his memoir of Erskine:

Presbyterian by his own paternal connection with the author of the Institutes [Professor Erskine, not Calvin!] and the minister of Greyfriars, Episcopalian by his maternal descent and by his early education, it came to pass that in later life, while still delighting in the occasional services and ministrations of the Episcopal Church, and enjoying to the last the tender care of an Episcopalian curate, he yet habitually frequented the worship and teaching of the National Church, both in country and in town ...¹²

The mature Erskine, it is true, would read the daily psalm and lesson from the Church of England lectionary, claiming that he valued "the fixed order in which this calendar induces me to go through the various parts of the Bible irrespectively of my own predilections and fancies."¹⁵ He also felt the attractions of the Anglican style of worship:

I really prefer the Church of England service to any that I know, it brings us all so much into one, and it makes the minister so much the mouth and the leader of the people, instead of lifting him out from the people and making him the only doer of anything in the church...¹⁴

Extravagant conclusions, however, have been drawn from this. It is less than wholly credible to attribute Erskine's rebellion against Calvinism to Episcopalian influence in his childhood. Two important facts placed in conjunction suggest strongly that whatever the motivating forces were behind Erskine's declension from Calvinism, an Episcopal boyhood was not one of them. The first fact is that the Scottish Episcopal

Church stood in a strongly non-juring, anti-Calvinist tradition.¹⁵ The second is that by the time Erskine had arrived at a mature personal faith in 1816, he was a Calvinistic Evangelical who believed in predestination, the new birth as individual conversion, justification by faith alone, and the eternal security of the saints. Further, he had a deep admiration for the Puritans - "the true and enlightened crusaders who, with all the zeal and courage which conducted their chivalrous ancestors to the earthly Jerusalem, fought their way to the heavenly city"¹⁶ - as well as for their Evangelical heirs, such as Philip Doddridge, Thomas Adams and John Foster. Perhaps most telling, he did not display the slightest belief in episcopacy or the apostolic succession, and he explicitly and almost contemptuously repudiated the high view of the sacraments held by the Scottish Episcopalians.¹⁷ This last trait is documented from his post-Calvinist period.

If Erskine's mind had been significantly shaped by his Episcopalian childhood, it is difficult to see how from 1816 to 1830, the most active and productive years of his life, he could have held the faith of an Evangelical Calvinist. This is the last thing one would expect from someone seriously influenced by the Scottish Episcopal tradition. Erskine's drift from Calvinism, moreover, did not take him back into Episcopalianism, but out into classical nineteenth century British Liberalism. One must conclude, I think, that Episcopalianism can be safely discounted as a genuine factor in Erskine's movement away from Calvinism. His theological metamorphosis was, in the last resort, analogous to that of his friends and collaborators, A.J. Scott, John McLeod Campbell, Robert Story and Edward Irving, all of whom began from a fundamental Calvinism in their theology, and none of whom has an Episcopal ghost haunting his boyhood.¹⁸

From this brief glance ahead, let us return to Lady Graham of Airth. This Jacobite matron did not merely provide Erskine

with a pious and loving mother and an (albeit probably theologically irrelevant) Episcopalian boyhood. Her second daughter, Erskine's aunt Mary, married John Stirling of Kippenross and this union supplied Erskine with no fewer than thirteen cousins. Among them we may here mention Captain James Stirling, a lifelong friend, and Katherine Stirling, who married Erskine's elder brother James.

The marriage of David Erskine and Ann Graham was itself quite productive in terms of offspring. Their first child John was born in 1782, but he died at the age of 7, a year after Thomas' own birth. Their second child William lived less than a year, between October 1783 and May 1784. Their third, Ann, survived longer; born in 1786, she reached the age of seventeen before dying of a spinal infection in 1804. Thomas would have been fifteen at the time. In 1787 Thomas' elder brother was born: James Erskine, who was to occupy a unique place in his brother's affections and to exercise an abiding influence on his character. Thomas himself entered this life on the 13th October 1788, the year in which Charles Wesley left it. Thomas and James would grow up together not only as good friends, but as spiritual companions, brothers in the flesh and in the faith. A year later in 1789 Christian was born; she was to mean much to Erskine in later years as "the angel in the house" at Linlathen.¹⁹ Finally, in 1791, David was born.

"David" is an odd name for a girl. Erskine's second surviving sister was given this name in circumstances which bring us again into the presence of death.

Erskine's father, troubled by ill-health, had travelled abroad to Italy in the hope that the Mediterranean climate would benefit him, accompanied on the journey by his pregnant wife. There, while staying in a house called the Crocelle, in Naples, he died just a few months before the birth of his third daughter. His other children were still in Scotland, in

Airth castle under Lady Graham's care. Thomas was two, James three. To perpetuate the memory of their late father and her own husband, Ann Erskine named her last daughter David, although she came affectionately to be known as "Davie".

When one reflects on the importance of the Fatherhood of God in Erskine's mature theology, it is striking to think that to all intents and purposes he never experienced the love and discipline of a human father. He seems to have been aware of the gap in his life. Thirty-six years later, in May 1827, he wrote these words when he was himself in Naples:

I arrived here yesterday, and I am sitting in the house where my father died, the Crocelle, in 1791. I have often wished that I had the slightest trace of him in my memory, but I was just two years old when he left home. I know nothing of my father's mind except very general traits. I don't know how he felt when he knew that he was on the borders of the invisible world. There is something very striking in the relation between a father and a child when death prevents any personal acquaintance between them. When he parted from me he knew as little of me as I did of him, and yet no doubt he felt an interest in me; but when he looked at me he could no more conjecture what was within me or what my destiny might probably be, than he could conjecture what was going on in the moon. What a strange interest that is which we can thus take in beings that we are absolutely ignorant of! I feel a love for my father and a deep interest in him. Are these earthly connections to extend beyond this world in any shape?²⁰

In spite of his father's untimely death, no serious loss of family life and affection was occasioned in the boyhood of the young Erskine. He was surrounded by a host of godly, cultivated and loyal relations. Erskine's youth, indeed, was exceptionally happy;²¹ it infused into him a vital sense of the worth of human kinship. As he commented in 1826, when he was away in London and feeling homesick:

The charm of blood-relationships grows upon me very much. I love my kindred, and much reason have I to thank God that so many of my kindred according to the flesh belong to the family of Heaven.²²

The spheres of the natural and the supernatural were very closely related for Erskine. He did not exactly confuse them (although his later thought tended in that direction), but he did look with suspicion and distaste on any religion which he felt undermined the natural texture of human life. The Moravian community at Herrnhut, for instance, was to arouse his dislike in this connection.

It is very beautiful, no doubt [he remarked in 1822 in a letter to Thomas Chalmers], but surely Christianity was never intended to interfere with the natural relations of life and to form men into artificial communities, but rather to infuse its own character and life²³ into those relations which already existed.

He spoke from experience. Vital Christianity and happy family life were deeply blended in the childhood of Thomas Erskine.

Erskine was particularly influenced by his mother in this respect. What little we know of her comes from his pen. Writing to John McLeod Campbell, Erskine described her thus on her death in 1836:

She was of a very nervous agitated nature ... [She] lived very much in the spirit of a little child, meek and lowly in heart, learning I trust from Jesus Himself, and most willing to learn from anyone. She has been to us, in her relation of mother, a most instructive type and witness of the love of God.²⁴

Elaborating on this last point in a letter to his cousin Rachel he says:

There is nothing so like our relation to God as our relation to a mother. There

is none who has borne so much from us; there
 is none whose forgiveness we have looked
 upon so much as our due.²⁵

Yet more revealing are words written to Adolph Monod, the French preacher, on the death of Monod's own mother:

A father, and especially a mother, is a true substantial gospel, proclaimed to every child of man from his infancy, the gospel of a love which may be perfectly relied on, and with which no idea of its having been earned or merited is even connected - the gospel of a love which longs for a return and is grieved until it is returned, but yet remains unexhausted although unreturned. When I was absent from home I could always count with certainty on my mother's letters, however irregular I might have been myself in writing to her. She was to me the type of an untiring love, ready to explain and forget every neglect - a love which identified itself with me and my character and doings, feeling for anything wrong in me as acutely as if she had done it herself.²⁶

Erskine's religious life would seem to have been determined at a very deep level by Ann Erskine. It may well have been his upbringing by this pious and evidently feminine woman (lacking the masculine corrective that a father's presence would have supplied) which rendered him unusually sensitive to the more tender aspects of the Christian faith. Conversely, it may have been this same factor which produced in him a reluctance to come to terms with Christianity's sterner side: the justice of God, guilt, retribution, judgment, hell. If anywhere, I think it is here, rather than in Episcopalianism, that the early seeds of Erskine's mature universalism were sown. "There is nothing so like our relation to God as our relation to a mother."

We also discover in Ann Erskine the source of that sympathy which was one of the most prominent features in Erskine's own character. Principal Shairp states the case appositely

when, in describing Erskine's character, he says that, "It was as if inside his man's understanding he hid, as it were, a woman's heart."²⁷ It is as well, however, to enter a caveat at this point. For from the testimony of Erskine's friends, and even from more modern accounts, it is not difficult to gain the impression that the laird of Linlathen was a quiet, serene, inoffensive man, apart from the world and incapable of controversy - in short, a mild and eirenic recluse.²⁸ But this picture is not confirmed by the evidence. At the peak of Erskine's career, in the theological and church court warfare of 1828 - 31, we will see him writing, speaking and acting with a militant conviction of the righteousness of the cause he represents, and with an equally uncompromising belief in the falsehood and wickedness of the religious tradition he is attacking. We will find him attending incessant meetings, denouncing the teaching of the land's spiritual leaders as "leprosy", "a false gospel", "absolutely nothing", "a shifting sand which affords no rest to the wearied soul",²⁹ and embracing an ardent charismatic millennarianism which moves him to proclaim that "the treader of the winepress of the wrath of Almighty God" is about to pour out the vials of final judgment on the world.³⁰ We will also find that uncharitableness and bigotry are typical of the not unjustifiable charges brought against him by his enemies. In all this, the behaviour and attitudes of Erskine can and should be viewed as particularly bold outcrops of abiding features in his character. His warmth and sympathy were very real, but were tempered by an essential dogmatism, an unsparing insistence on the validity of his own insights.³¹

Erskine's boyhood was spent in a variety of picturesque places: Airth castle, with its romantic setting in Falkirk carse and its Episcopalian piety; Cardross, "lovely Cardross, fair and noble Cardross, with its grave square tower, and its trees, under which our fathers' fathers have played, and its beautiful extent of grass, and its seclusion, and its simple peasantry",³²

where Erskine's uncle James lived; Walkinshaw, near Paisley, the abode of Ann Erskine's youngest sister Wilhelmina and her family; Hinckley, in Leicestershire, where young Ann Erskine underwent prolonged treatment for her spinal disease; Edinburgh, where the family had its own house in St. David Street, near St. Andrew's Square; Durham, where James and Thomas attended a private school for a year or so, and whose countryside struck the latter as "the most beautiful place almost I ever saw, the river is so fine, and the steep banks are so splendidly fringed over with trees";³³ and above all, Kippenross. This spot in Stirlingshire housed the estate of the vast Stirling family, presided over by the second daughter of Lady Graham and her husband. Its natural scenery and human inhabitants held a lasting fascination for Erskine. Revisiting the place in 1828 when he was forty, he wrote:

I am at dear Kippenross. It is a profound enjoyment to me, for its loveliness has been mixed up with many of my earliest and most enduring impressions, with many joys and many sorrows, with things of earth and things of heaven, and the sight of it recalls them all and gives a freshness to memory and surrounds me anew with those who are dead or distant ... there is a spell in it on my spirit beyond what I have³⁴ experienced from any other spot on earth.

It was at Kippenross that Erskine became acquainted with his cousin James Stirling, the sole member of the family to outlive him. Sooner or later they discovered each other to be fellow art-lovers and dissenters from Calvinism. Here also he met Patrick Stirling, another good friend, whose early death was to have a decisive impact on Erskine in reclaiming him for Christianity out of the toils of religious scepticism. Here, too, James Erskine met his future wife Katherine.

We have no information on Erskine's early education. He may have attended a parish school, or been privately tutored

as his uncle John had been. Perhaps the latter is more likely; we know that his mother employed a governess during Erskine's early years.³⁵ At any rate, in 1796 James and Thomas, now nine and eight years respectively, commenced attendance at the High School in Edinburgh, at that time under the rectorship of Dr. Alexander Adam. This at least ensured that their childhood was not totally idyllic. Lord Cockburn had emerged from the school a few years previously, and has left a grim account of what it was like. It was already "notorious for its severity and riotousness"³⁶ when Cockburn began attendance himself in 1787 as a boy of eight; he says he travelled to the school on his first day in fear and trembling. It seems to have lived up to his forebodings:

the general tone of the school was vulgar and harsh. Among the boys, coarseness of language and manners was the only fashion. An English boy was so rare that his accent was openly laughed at. No lady could be seen within the walls. Nothing evidently civilised was safe. Two of the masters in particular were so savage that any master doing now what they did every hour would certainly be transported.³⁷

Pupils remained at the school six years, if they survived, the first four under an ordinary master, the last two under Dr. Adam himself. It was the Erskines' misfortune during their first four years to have one of the more savage masters: William Nicol, companion of the poet Robert Burns, who according to Sir Walter Scott was "inhumanly cruel to the boys under his charge".³⁸ The memory of Nicol's sadism remained vivid in Erskine's mind till his dying day.³⁹

To some extent Dr. Adam himself compensated for this. A patient and inspiring teacher, full of encouragement and "enthusiastically delighted with every appearance of talent and goodness",⁴⁰ he imprinted himself in Erskine's mind as an admirable specimen of humanity.⁴¹ Perhaps from the figure

of good Dr. Adam, striving patiently but passionately to impart knowledge and virtue to unruly pupils, Erskine gained impressions which helped form his mature vision of God as the grand Educator. It is otherwise remarkable, in view of the coarse and brutal atmosphere of the Edinburgh High School, that Erskine should come to select education as the basic metaphor explaining the meaning of life.

Politically, Dr. Adam was a progressive liberal. Like any Latin teacher, says Cockburn, he spoke much of "liberty, and the people, and the expulsion of the Tarquins, and republics," except that in Dr. Adam's case a stamp of personal conviction marked his words.⁴² It is not surprising that some of his pupils, such as Cockburn, Francis Jeffrey and Henry Brougham, became leading Whig politicians. Erskine may also betray this influence in his adult desire to justify the ways of God to men, to make them see the reasonableness and equity of the divine government of the world. God was not a deified Tarquinius Superbus!

High school education in those days was rigidly Latin-based. Cockburn tells us he was so wearied by it that he could conceive of Latin only as an instrument for the torture of little boys.⁴³ A less unhealthy aspect of the system was its egalitarianism; social distinctions vanished under the tawse of the teacher and the rough-and-tumble of the playground. It was a levelling and socialising process of the most thorough kind, which combined with the austere tutorial regime justifies Principal Shairp's conclusion that

even if [Erskine's] early years had been too tenderly nurtured, school life, as it then existed, especially in the rough old High School of Edinburgh, was sure to give scope enough for the hardy virtues.⁴⁴

Through the rugged buffetings of the Edinburgh High School passed many prominent individuals: the Haldane brothers,

John Campbell the missionary, Sir Walter Scott, Francis Horner, Cockburn, Jeffrey, Brougham, and Thomas Erskine.⁴⁵

One of the effects of the Anglicising of the Scottish upper classes in the nineteenth century was the increasing popularity of English schools for their children's education. Ann Erskine seems to have been drawn into this southern gravitation; in 1802, she sent the two Erskine brothers to a school in Durham, after their emancipation from Edinburgh High School. This brief period in Erskine's boyhood is interesting for the earliest evidence it supplies of his religious life. He had just turned fourteen at the time; two letters he wrote from Durham to his sister Christian have been preserved.⁴⁶ The first contains the following amusing complaint about his youngest sister Davie:

Do you know, Christian, Davie never sent her love or compliments to me in her letter to James, and only mentions my name once, and then it is squeezed up in a small hole between two lines, and then she says that all sent love to Tom, but herself never. Tell her that I am prodigiously angry at her, and that I cannot be appeased unless she write me a letter on her birthday.⁴⁷

This letter ends:

'May God keep you in His fear and preserve you from all perils both of body and soul'.⁴⁸ The next letter is more interesting, exhibiting as it does the earliest surviving example of Erskine's bent for religious consolation. A relative whom he refers to as "excellent aunt Lady Hamilton" had died - evidently a pious woman, beloved of the Erskines. Fourteen year old Tom writes to thirteen year old Christian thus:

We are taught in a certain place [I THESS.4:13] that we should not mourn for our friends without hope; we should rather endeavour, by imitating her many good qualities, to fit ourselves for that blessed place where

every tear is wiped from every eye [REV.21:4] ;
 where we meet our friends, never to part
 again. I know that Davie will be very much
 affected. Tell her to dry her tears and
 to prepare herself for that place where we
 are assured the faithful followers of Christ
 will live for ever and ever [JN.14:3] .⁴⁹

There are at least three references to New Testament texts in this passage. Here is proof that in his early teens Erskine was capable of using the language of Biblical piety when he felt moved to do so. Whether it is specifically Evangelical piety is a moot point.

An important event is signalled in this same epistle. Erskine expresses his eager anticipation of seeing "my dear uncle Doctor Erskine again".⁵⁰ But less than a month after these words were written, John Erskine had gone to "that blessed place where every tear is wiped from every eye", where "the faithful followers of Christ live for ever and ever." The leadership of the Evangelical party in the Kirk fell to the even more aristocratic Sir Henry Moncrieff.

(ii) The legal profession and spiritual turmoils

Sometime in 1803 or 1804, when Britain was gripped by war-fever at the prospect of a Napoleonic invasion, young Erskine returned to Scotland and matriculated as a law student at Edinburgh University, thus entering the faculty made illustrious by his grandfather fifty years previously. Erskine was around sixteen at this point. For the next decade Edinburgh was his home. Living with the rest of the family in their house in St. David Street, Erskine was to be seen every day performing the health-ritual of walking to the top of Arthur's Seat and back, a journey he made a point of finishing in less than an hour.¹ The Erskine family was intimate at this time with James Dundas of Ochertyre, who had married Ann Erskine's sister Elizabeth, Lady Graham's third daughter. The Dundasses

lived in St. Andrew's Square, virtually next-door to the Erskines; their house was a familiar resort for many substantial and distinguished persons, attracted (says Hanna) by James Dundas's hospitality and his wife's "sparkling wit".² No doubt this aspect of Edinburgh - high society and university life - must have been a welcome contrast for Erskine to the asperities of the City High School.

There is little, however, to tell of Erskine's university life, except for one crucial event which will be related in a few moments. Erskine obtained his degree, passed all necessary trials, and, now a young man of twenty-two, was accepted into membership of the Faculty of Advocates in 1810, following father and grandfather into the legal profession. He did so at a notable time. This was one of the outstanding eras in the history of the Scottish bar: Fullerton, Brougham, Horner, Jeffrey and Cockburn dominated both the juridical scene by the eloquence of their pleading and a broader scene by their leadership of the Whiggish revolt against the prevalent Toryism in Scottish Society - a revolt principally carried on through the Edinburgh Review, founded in October 1802, and then at its pinnacle of fame and influence. With such refined and worldly men Erskine the advocate came to be on terms of close and abiding friendship. As one born for it, Erskine entered into a genteel and civilized world. His place in it was cemented even more firmly in 1811 when his brother James married Katherine Stirling and removed to Linlathen.³

These years in Scotland's capital witnessed two spiritual earthquakes in Erskine's soul. The first was perhaps the closest he approached to a conversion experience; the second brought him near the edge of apostasy.

In 1805 a remarkable book was published by an even more remarkable person. Erskine read it, and here is his testimony:

There is an English book [he is corresponding with a French lady] written by one John Foster, a Baptist lately dead, containing many profound and striking thoughts; one of the subjects treated is 'on a man's writing memoirs of himself' ... I remember reading that essay when I was seventeen or eighteen years of age, and feeling the truth of it very much; I felt how life was necessarily a progressive education of our character either for good or for evil, and that the responsibility connected with this our position was of such a solemn and overpowering weight that a continual receiving of help from on high was essential to our success, and a continual looking to God for that help was our first duty and our chief privilege.⁴

John Foster was one of the least typical Evangelicals that England produced in the age of Simeon and Wilberforce. Born the son of a Baptist farmer in 1770, he was a "nervous, gloomy and sensitive" personality⁵, whose greatest joy from childhood was the study of books and nature. He became a Baptist pastor in 1792. This was a year after John Wesley's death: the first generation of the Evangelical revival was gone, the second in the ascendant and the third beginning to emerge. Foster belonged to this third generation. Politically, he espoused a zealous republicanism (dangerous in the days of the French revolution), and his first pastorate in Ireland almost landed him in prison owing to his intimacy and sympathies with the Irish democrats.⁶ Other pastorates followed in England, broken up by illness; Foster suffered from thyroid trouble which played havoc with his preaching. His main ministry was carried out in Bristol, an old revival centre.

Foster's true talent, however, was literary. A regular contributor to the Eclectic Review Foster did for Evangelicalism in prose what William Cowper had done for it in poetry. His first publication in 1805, four pieces entitled simply Essays, proved his most enduring work. The titles of the four essays are:

On a Man's Writing Memoirs of Himself;
On Decision of Character;
On the Application of the Epithet 'Romantic';
 and On Some of the Causes by which Evangelical Religion
has been rendered less acceptable to Persons of
Cultivated Taste.

They are an impressive combination of lucid prose, imaginative power, deep observation of human nature, and all-permeating Evangelical faith. Erskine's adolescent mind was captivated. So was the older mind of Thomas Chalmers when he persued Foster: "He moves along in a region far above the common intellectual level. There are passages in his essays of amazing depth and beauty."⁷ It was one of many areas in which Erskine and Chalmers shared a common mind.

Foster, who died in 1843, continued to hold eccentric opinions his whole life. In addition to his republicanism (he said he "never ceased to regard royalty and all its gaudy paraphernalia as a sad satire on human nature"⁸), he also expressed the view that "churches are useless and mischievous institutions, and the sooner they are dissolved the better"⁹ - certainly a strange tenet for an Evangelical pastor. He appears not to have believed in the continuing validity of water-baptism.¹⁰ Most interestingly of all, he entertained grave doubts about the doctrine of eternal punishment:

I acknowledge my inability (I would say it reverently) to admit that belief, together with a belief in the Divine Goodness - the belief that 'God is love', that His tender mercies are over all His works.¹¹

Foster took refuge in a linguistic argument similar to that later used by F D Maurice, namely, that the Greek word for eternal does not necessarily mean everlasting.

In the light of the fact that Erskine finally came to an almost identical position, it is indeed remarkable that the

man whose essays were responsible for his spiritual awakening should himself have held Universalist views. Even more remarkable, however, is the fact that Foster did not publicise these views (he mentioned them only in private conversation and correspondence), and also the fact that there is no evidence of his having in any way influenced Erskine towards his mature convictions on the specific topic of the salvation of all mankind. We must conclude, therefore, that the striking coincidence of eschatological outlook between the two men was nothing more than that - a remarkably odd coincidence, without evident cause or explanation. The personal reasons for espousing Universalism, however, were in each case the same: an inability to reconcile hell with the love and mercy of God.

It is conceivable, although not provable, that Erskine drank in his first draught of Evangelical conviction from Foster. Indeed, since Foster was a firm Calvinist, placing great stress on the utter depravity of the natural man and the need for an efficacious work of regeneration by the Spirit of God,¹² it is possible that Foster was a seminal influence on Erskine in his early adherence to Calvinism. Erskine himself, however, does not mention this, and it must therefore remain a conjecture. What Erskine specifically mentions is the grand and piercing sense of eternity which Foster's first essay mediated to him: the consciousness that time is but a pilgrimage, and yet a vitally significant one, since it is here that the spirit is moulded for eternity. The following passage from the essay sums up Foster's concern:

The smallest thing rises into consequence when regarded as the commencement of what has advanced or is advancing into magnificence. The first rude settlement of Romulus would have been an insignificant circumstance, and might justly have sunk into oblivion, if Rome had not at length commanded the world. The little rill near the source of one of the great American rivers is an interesting object to the traveller who is apprised as

he steps across it, or walks a few miles along its bank, that this is the stream which runs so far and which gradually swells into so vast a flood. So, while I anticipate the endless progress of life, and wonder through what unknown scenes it is to take its course, its past years lose that character of vanity which would seem to belong to a train of fleeting, perishing moments, and I see them assuming the dignity of a commencing eternity. In them I have begun to be that conscious existence which I am to be through endless duration; and I feel a strange emotion of curiosity about this little life in which I am setting out on such a progress ... We may regard our past life as a continual though irregular course of education.¹³

Foster branded an indelible birth-mark on Erskine's religion through his vision of the profound intersection of time and eternity, the latter pervading and giving significance to the former. This was to constitute the permanent basis of Erskine's religious consciousness. Time was a school which educated the soul for eternity. This motif would remain unchanged throughout Erskine's theological journey into and out of Calvinism, through Irvingism, to Universalism. By the writings of an English republican Baptist, this Scottish aristocratic Episcopalian was powerfully and lastingly awakened, at the age of seventeen, to the reality of eternity and of God.¹⁴

One final thing merits our attention before moving on. Foster's first essay contains a poignant passage about self-examination. It reads thus:

Men are content to have no more intimate sense of their existence than what they feel in the exercise of their faculties on extraneous objects. The vital being, with all its agency and emotions, is so blended and absorbed in these its exterior interests, that it is very rarely collected and concentrated in the consciousness of its own absolute SELF, so as to be recognized as

thing internal, apart and alone, for its own inspection and knowledge. Men carry their minds as for the most part they carry their watches, content to be ignorant of the constitution and action within, and attentive only to the little exterior circle of things, to which the passions, like indexes, are pointing.¹⁵

Erskine was not to be guilty of this charge. Deeply introspective by temperament, he would show himself in more than one sense in his own writings to be the theologian of the mind.¹⁶

This spiritual awakening via Foster took place in 1805 or 6, when Erskine had just begun to study law at Edinburgh University. But probably in 1811, some six years later, when he had barely begun to practise as an advocate, he found himself seriously questioning the very truth of Christianity. Ironically, this was the year in which Thomas Chalmers, fresh from his conversion experience, first read Foster's Essays "with great relish and excitement", praising their "profoundly evangelical views".¹⁷ Such joy was now six years distant from Erskine. It had given way to that most typical nineteenth century religious phenomenon: doubt. We will let Erskine tell the story himself:

I was brought up from my childhood in the belief of the supernatural and miraculous in connection with religion, especially in connection with the person and life and teaching of Jesus Christ, and like many in the present day, I came, in after life, to have misgivings as to the credibility of this wonderful history. But the patient study of the narrative and of its place in the history of the world, and the perception of a light in it which entirely satisfied my reason and my conscience, finally overcame these misgivings, and forced on me the conviction of its truth.¹⁸

This description was given late in life; the memory of Erskine's doubt remained fresh with him. His language suggests a

serious crisis of faith: "I was brought up from my childhood in the belief ... I came, in after life, to have misgivings ... patient study ... finally overcame ... forced on me the conviction." What occasioned this crisis? In all probability it was Erskine's intimate association with irreligious but highly polished and cultivated men in Parliament House - men like Cockburn, Fullerton and Jeffrey. Erskine was mixing daily with men seemingly as civilized as James and himself, "few of whom made any profession of a faith in Christianity".¹⁹ This, as far as we know, was a new experience for Erskine. It resulted in a challenge to his religious profession sufficiently serious to drive him to the limits of scepticism.

The nature of this crisis can be defined very specifically. Erskine says that up until now he had believed in "The supernatural and the miraculous in connection with religion, especially in connection with the person and life and teaching of Jesus Christ", but that he now began to doubt the truth "of this wonderful history".²⁰ A number of other points substantiate this interpretation. We know that Erskine had read David Hume's Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding before 1822, probably at this period. The book contains a famous and lengthy argument against the credibility of miracles on the grounds that they violate common experience and are therefore so improbable as to be unbelievable.²¹ Moreover, in his own Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion, Erskine was to give considerable attention to the value of the miraculous as proof of the gospel's veracity, and to arrive at a different conclusion from that popularized by the school of Paley.

We may also think that the miraculous was peculiarly liable in these circumstances to be subjected to doubt in a young man of Erskine's background and experience. Erskine would always basically conceive of God as the eternal source of

all temporal meaning, accessible through conscience - the moral presence which had permeated and established his environment from childhood. Having now for the first time been brought into a situation in life in which his environment was challenging rather than confirming his faith, the first thing to feel the pressure of doubt would very likely be the miraculous. It was that element in his religion which most obviously did not fit in either with the smooth continuity of the natural and supernatural in his experience of life so far, nor with the highly unsupernatural world of Lord Cockburn, Parliament House and Edinburgh Review Whiggism. Could those outlandish miracles of the Bible honestly be credited? Or could they really be essential to a belief in a wise and beneficent Creator and Lawgiver? And yet, if the miracles of the gospel could not be believed, what became of the rest of it? An unconstitutional Deity whose royal prerogative frequently dispensed with His universe's laws, a supernatural Saviour who did things unheard of in Parliament House, such as returning to life three days after His burial: was this really the religion of a sane and sensible young advocate? Such may have been the sort of thoughts which passed through Erskine's troubled mind. And we will remember all this when in 1830 we see him proclaiming his ardent and apocalyptic adherence to the miraculous phenomena of the Gareloch, as if in compensation for the Deistic doubts of 1811.

To allay his doubts, Erskine took to serious theological study of the evidences of Christianity. This was a topic of extensive contemporary interest, and its literature was abundant. Among the books Erskine read at this time we can probably include Joseph Butler's Analogy of Religion,²² his future friend Thomas Chalmers' Evidence and Authority of the Christian Revelation, and possibly Soame Jenyns' A View of the Internal Evidences of the Christian Religion.²³ He speaks in his own Remarks as if he were well acquainted

with the popular proof-by-miracle apologetics of the type associated with William Paley,²⁴ and it is therefore reasonable to assume that he also studied Paley's Evidence of Christianity and perhaps his Natural Theology too. He may have consulted his friend Dr. Charles Stuart of Dunearn, who had pronounced views on the evidence question.²⁵

However, the basic factor in the re-establishment of Erskine's faith was his "patient study" of the Bible itself: "the perception of a light in it which entirely satisfied my reason and my conscience".²⁶ This was what Erskine would expound with considerable skill in his Remarks. The following quotation from that book sums up Erskine's experience as he studied the Bible in those days of doubt:

...when we read a history which authoritatively claims to be an exhibition of the character of God in His dealings with men - if we find in it that which fills and overflows our most dilated conceptions of moral worth and loveliness in the Supreme Being, and at the same time feel that it is triumphant in every appeal that it makes to our consciences, in its statements of the obliquity and corruption of our own hearts - and if our reason further discovers a system of powerful moral stimulants embodied in facts of this history, which necessarily tend to produce in the mind a resemblance to that high character which is there portrayed - if we discern that the spirit of this history gives peace to the conscience by the very exhibition which quickens its sensibility - that it dispels the terrors of guilt by the very fact which associates sin with the full loathing of the heart - that it combines in one wondrous and consistent whole our most fearful forebodings and our most splendid anticipations for futurity - that it inspires a pure and elevated and joyful hope for eternity by those very declarations which attach a deeper and more interesting obligation to the discharge of the minutest part of human duty - if we see that the object of all its tendencies is the perfection of moral happiness and that these tendencies are naturally connected

with the belief of its narration - if we see all this in the gospel, we may then say that our own eyes have seen its truth and that we need no other testimony: we may then well believe that God has been pleased, in pity to our wretchedness and in condescension to our feebleness, to clothe the eternal laws which regulate His spiritual government in such a form as may be palpable to our conceptions and adapted to the urgency of our necessities.²⁷

Erskine discovered that the Bible itself contained all the proof he needed that Christianity was true. His verdict was that of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, with whom he had so much in common in spiritual and theological matters:

The truth revealed by Christ has its evidence in itself, and the proof of its divine authority in its fitness to our nature and needs; the clearness and cogency of this proof being proportionate to the degree²⁸ of self-knowledge in each individual hearer.

Reading Foster brought Erskine his first spiritual awakening; reading the Bible in a spirit of honest inquiry brought him his second.

Human testimony, however, was also instrumental in re-establishing Erskine's disturbed faith. Patrick Stirling of Kippenross, one of his boyhood friends, was struck down with a fatal disease sometime in late 1815 or early 1816, and travelled south to Kent in the vain hope of recovery in England's milder climate. By March 1816 it was obvious that he was dying. He requested that his youngest child, an only daughter aged one, be brought to him from Scotland that he might see her once more before he died. Erskine agreed to bring her to him.

Erskine arrived in Hastings, where his cousin lay dying, with little time to spare. It was one of the first deathbed scenes

which we knew him to have witnessed.²⁹ Many others were to follow. As Erskine himself would drily comment: "I have a particular destiny for witnessing such scenes."³⁰ This one, however, had a special significance. Patrick Stirling expressed a triumphant faith in Christ as he died, and the experience seems to have had a decisive effect on Erskine.

Not only was his own faith so fixed thereby as not again to falter; for the first time a zeal to awaken a like faith in others was kindled.³¹

Erskine's career as a legal advocate may have been about to come to an end, but his career as an advocate for spiritual truth was just beginning.

II. WRITER AND TRAVELLER, 1816 - 1827

(i) Laird of Linlathen and "Salvation"

1816 marks a major turning-point in Erskine's life. Not for Erskine alone, it was a time of unrest and of new beginnings; the whole of Britain and the rest of Europe were now at last endeavouring to return to stable peacetime conditions, with the close of the Napoleonic wars and the redrawing of the continental map carried through at the Vienna Congress of September 1814 to June 1815. The Bourbon monarchy once more ruled France; the ancien regime seemed in the ascendant again across a revolution-scarred Europe. Peace abroad, however, did not bring peace at home, and Britain was beset with economic and social problems, involving a huge national debt, inflated corn prices, unemployment, industrialisation and its attendant difficulties, and the outbreak of radical riots in 1816, 1817 and most notoriously in 1819 (when the Peterloo massacre occurred). On the more Scottish and ecclesiastical side, 1816 was the year that saw Glasgow spellbound when Thomas Chalmers preached his Astronomical Discourses which, when published, sold innumerable copies and extorted literary praise even from the virulently anti-Evangelical critic William Hazlitt.¹ The General Assembly of the Kirk, too, was riveted that year by Chalmers' speech in favour of the abolition of pluralities, which moved Lord Jeffrey to compare the Presbyterian orator with Demosthenes. Another future Presbyterian orator also caused a stir in the Assembly, although not by making a speech; young licentiate Edward Irving battered one of the gallery doors almost off its hinges in an attempt to gain access for himself and his fellow divinity students to that section of the gallery reserved for them (it had been illicitly occupied by members of the public and closed to further access by an obtuse official).²

In Erskine's case 1816 was a year that brought an access both

of great sorrows and fresh horizons. His revived faith now apparently made its first effort to communicate itself to another, a dying friend; Erskine was turned angrily out of the room for his pains, but the man relented and begged Erskine to stay with him until the end.³

The end came also in this year for the man closest to Thomas Erskine's heart. Some time in late August or early September, his elder brother James died of typhus fever in Broadstairs, Kent.

Erskine was prostrated with grief. It was said that he sometimes wept for a whole day when a close relative died.⁴ It must indeed have been a keen pang which afflicted him now, on the death of the companion of his youth. "My heart is stunned", he wrote. "I have lost a Christian friend, a spiritual guide."⁵

God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor His ways as our ways. May He by His Holy Spirit conform our wills unto His holy will. Katherine [James' widow] is wonderfully supported, but it is an awful blow. Pray for us, that this dispensation may be sanctified to us, that we may look more to Christ, that we may look wholly to Christ. Oh! there is nothing else of any consequence. We live in the midst of shadows, and we think them realities. Lord, open thou our eyes that we may see the truth and that we may be assured that Thy love is better than life. We hardly know yet what has happened to us; it seems a troubled dream; but we know that it is the Lord, and that He doeth all things well.⁶

The belief in a wise providence; the desire for fellowship with the Saviour; sorrow as a means of sanctification; the vanity of the world: these were to be abiding characteristics of Erskine's religious faith.

It is impossible (as Hanna observes) to ascertain the real

nature and extent of the influence which James Erskine exercised on his more famous brother. From Erskine's own testimony, however, it is clear that the influence was great. Late in life, Julia Wedgwood records of Erskine that "he used to speak [of James] with a change of voice and countenance that made one feel as if it could have been but a few weeks since the two were separated. 'Fifty years have passed since he went,' he said, 'and it seems to me as if it were yesterday!'"⁷ Erskine also claimed that the memory of James was "a blessed help to me in my relation to Jesus and my realization of the character of God",⁸ and he remarked to his sister Christian that James was the most perfect symbol of a "spiritual being" he had met in any man, "like what I can suppose glorified humanity will be".⁹ Here is Erskine's last recorded description of him, written in 1866:

I think my brother was the most remarkable man I ever knew. On looking back through a long vista of years, during which I have come in contact with many remarkable unforgettable persons, he stands out by himself as one in whom worth of moral character, manliness, truth, and perfect regard for the rights, interests and feelings of every human being, accomplished more in producing the sentiment of veneration (I would even say) than I have known produced by all the talents in the world, accompanied even by the average amount of moral endowment. I never knew a young man venerated except himself. He was only a year older than myself, and I venerated him from infancy...¹⁰

Two other contemporary testimonies to James Erskine's character exist. The first is that of Sir Harry Moncrieff:

He [James] died in the prime of life, equally regretted for the good sense and affectionate manners, and for the genuine piety and purity of mind which eminently distinguished him.¹¹

The second is contained in the May 1870 edition of the Contemporary Review:

This young man [James] must have made a

strong impression on others than his own family, for, many years after his death, General Elphinston, our commander-in-chief in the Afghan war, on hearing Mr [Thomas] Erskine's name, asked if he were brother to Captain Erskine of such and such a regiment, and on being answered in the affirmative, said, "He was the best soldier and the best man I ever knew".¹²

James Erskine ranks with Ann Erskine as one of the profoundest formative influences on Thomas Erskine's religious life. Erskine himself says in a letter to A.J. Scott that he "realized" God's character through James.¹³ His testimony on this point is even clearer in a letter sent to Mrs Gurney in 1862:

I myself had a most noble-hearted brother, whom I loved and honoured and trusted entirely, and even now the thought of him helps me to realize my relation to the great Elder Brother, the loving Head of men ...¹⁴

Since Erskine specifically mentions "perfect regard for the rights, interests and feelings of every human being"¹⁵ as one of James' outstanding virtues, we can see here one of the reasons for Erskine's heartfelt belief in the universal love of God - a belief which would be one of the main factors in his ultimate break with Calvinism.

The death of James meant that the estate of Linlathen fell to Erskine. He mentions this in a letter:

Many new duties are indeed imposed on me, and I beg the prayers of my friends for grace to discharge them to the glory of the Imposer.¹⁶

So began Erskine's long association with Linlathen and his life as a Scottish country gentleman.

This departure from the bar did not entirely sever Erskine's links with Parliament House, for he maintained his friendship with men like Cockburn and Fullerton, although his outlook on life was now decidedly different from their Whiggish world-

liness.¹⁷ Indeed, after his brother's death, Erskine wrote a short essay entitled Salvation for the perusal of his legal friends, as a testimony to the Evangelical faith he had come to hold. This essay was published nearly ten years later in 1825 as an introduction to a new edition of Samuel Rutherford's letters in the Collins Christian Classic reprint series, whose chief promoter was Thomas Chalmers.¹⁸ Until then the essay lay unprinted in one of Erskine's bureaux or drawers at Linlathen. Whether he actually did show it to his colleagues at the bar we do not know.

Salvation is a manifesto of Erskine's early understanding of the essence of the Christian faith. It is therefore significant that he entitles it "Salvation" and mentions neither church nor sacraments from start to finish. There is no Scottish Episcopalianism here. The soul and its Saviour are the objects in view, and the emphasis is on an Evangelical theology of atonement. The theme of the essay is summed up in the following paragraph:

A restoration to spiritual health, or conformity to the divine character is the ultimate object of God in His dealings with the children of men. Whatever else God hath done with regard to men, has been subsidiary and with a view to this; even the unspeakable work of Christ and pardon freely offered through His cross, have been but means to a further end; and that end is that the adopted children of the family of God might be conformed to the likeness of their elder brother - that they might resemble Him in character and thus enter into His joy.¹⁹

Forgiveness without inward renewal, claims Erskine, would be meaningless; it would be like acquitting a prisoner with jail-fever but not restoring his health, or saving a madman from physical death but not healing his mind.²⁰ Salvation from the guilt of sin is instrumental to the higher end of participation in God's holiness. But if we are to be conformed

to God's moral likeness, argues Erskine, we must know Him as He is; God must reveal Himself in His full character, that we may see Him, love Him, and become like Him.²¹ If, therefore, God pardons our sins, He cannot do so in a way which seems to make light of them and condone them; for then His justice would be obscured from us and we would not see the truth or fulness of His character. Nor would we be able to revere such an apparently easy-going God.

We naturally esteem and even love perfect justice, except in those cases where its condemning sentence falls upon ourselves. At the same time, if justice is compromised, even in our own favour, our gratitude is necessarily mingled with a degree of contempt or disesteem; so that it is the union of kindness and justice in their highest degrees which alone can attract perfect reverential love. Now, supposing that such a manifestation of the character of God had been made, as that His mercy had seemed to overlook sanctity and throw it into the shade by affixing no stigma to transgression; our love could not have been accompanied by perfect reverence, and moreover, what is principally to be attended to, His love could not have the effect of healing our spiritual disease, because, not being attracted by the full and true character of God, it could not produce in us a resemblance to that true character, which is the main object to be accomplished.²²

This explains why God bestows the forgiveness of sins only through the death of Christ:

We can here love perfect justice, because we are not under its condemnation; we can here adore perfect mercy, because it₂^{is} unmixed with weakness or partiality.²³

Erskine's earliest understanding of the atonement is that of a moderate Calvinist. The theory he expounds is the theory of the New England divines, popularised in Britain by Andrew Fuller and known as the "moral government" theory. Christ suffered in the place of sinners, according to this theory,

in order to demonstrate God's hatred of sin, so that God might then pardon those who repent without seeming to make light of their transgressions.²⁴

This is by no means the orthodox Calvinistic theory of the atonement, the theory of "satisfaction". Indeed, there is a great gulf fixed between the two conceptions, for they are rooted in different understandings of the nature and function of law. According to the theory of satisfaction, the moral law is an inflexible expression of God's immutable character, which must be obeyed purely for its own sake; all infringements of that law are visited with retributive wrath, by an inexorable moral necessity of God's very being: vindictory justice. According to the theory of moral government, however, God's law springs from His supreme attribute of benevolence, and its aim is the good order and well-being of the rational universe; defiance of the law is punished not as necessitated retribution, but as an expression of God's disapproval of sin, a wise expedient to deter men from upsetting the harmony and happiness of created being.

That this latter is Erskine's conception of the atonement in Salvation is clear from the fact that his problem is not how God can forgive sin consistently with His own intrinsic punitive justice, but how He can do so in such a way that sinners will not (to their own harm) misinterpret the divine mercy as indulgence - two entirely distinct problems. As far as Erskine is concerned, it is not in the eternal attributes of God that the rationale for the death of Christ ultimately lies, but in the moral nature and needs of sinful man. Man's need to revere as well as to love God dictates that forgiveness be offered only in company with a demonstration of God's antagonism to sin.²⁵ Hence Erskine's sustained emphasis on the revelatory efficacy of the cross. Through the cross we see what sin is to God; God can thus pardon us without our being under any illusion as to the enormity

of transgression.

The sources of Erskine's moral government views are a matter of pure speculation. Such views had already been propagated in Britain by Fuller and others, and found a doughty Scottish champion in the person of Ralph Wardlaw, the Congregationalist divine.²⁶ The reason for Erskine's adherence to this theology, therefore, remains a mystery²⁷ but does not pose a problem. But it does give us a key to the future. The fact that even in his early Calvinistic days Erskine did not see retributive justice as a necessary attribute of God, reveals to us the source, and helps us to understand the inner logic, of his drift to Universalism. For if benevolence is the supreme characteristic of God's dealings with men, even in His giving of the law and its penal sanctions, it becomes difficult if not impossible to maintain belief in the eternal ruin of any creature, however sinful, unless one is willing to deny God's infinite wisdom (something Erskine was never prepared to do). What was previously said about Erskine's relationship to his mother can therefore be said with equal propriety here in regard to his initial understanding of the atonement: namely, that the seeds of his mature Universalism were early sown.

The concentration on man's moral nature and needs which Erskine displays in Salvation in connection with the atonement is also evident in his understanding of theology as such. He outlines what could be called an ethically utilitarian or pragmatist approach to truth:

We are not called upon to believe anything for the mere sake of believing it, any more than we are called on to take a medicine for the mere sake of taking it; we are called on to believe the truth on account of the healing influence that it has upon the mind, as we are called on to take a medicine on account of its influence on our bodily health.²⁸

Every revealed truth has a moral function. It shows us some aspect of God's character or will, and by receiving it into the mind we become conformed to it. Sanctification is a rational, psychological process:

We are not to expect any mechanical or extraneous impression [on the soul] separate from that which the truth makes; for it is by the truth alone, known and believed, that the Holy Spirit operates in accomplishing that sanctifying work which is itself salvation.²⁹

Hence the necessity for theology:

It follows from this that what is called doctrinal instruction, when properly applied, is really the most practical.³⁰

Like Schleiermacher in Germany and Coleridge in England (though independently of both) Erskine's tendency, even in his earliest written work, is to approach theology from a practical, immanent perspective. It is with the English thinker, however, that he is more in harmony, through the profoundly ethical colour in which he suffuses this perspective. From this starting point, the entire development of Erskine's theology fundamentally consists in what could be called his increasing moralisation of dogma, a progressive adjustment of the meaning of Christian doctrine to what Erskine felt to be the requirements of conscience. If R.S. Franks is correct in defining the principal effect of Romanticism on theology as a reinterpretation of traditional Christian beliefs by the postulation of an inner essence of moral and experimental truth hidden in their dogmatic husks, then it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Erskine - especially the later Erskine - was the first and perhaps greatest of Scotland's Romantic theologians.³¹

(ii) Thomas Chalmers and the evidence controversy

It was soon after Erskine's move to Linlathen that he formed his lifelong but enigmatic relationship with the man who was probably the most outstanding Evangelical of nineteenth century Scotland - Thomas Chalmers.

In October 1817, Erskine's elder sister Christian was married to Charles Stirling in Linlathen House. The couple then took up residence at Cadder, on the outskirts of Glasgow. Chalmers at this point was minister of the Glasgow Tron kirk, and already a nationally famous preacher. We do not know for certain when Erskine and Chalmers first met; but we do have a record of Erskine's first private visit to Chalmers in Glasgow. This took place on Friday 17th July 1818. Chalmers was clearly impressed by Erskine, as we learn from his diary entry for that day:

Mr. Erskine of Linlathen called between one and two, and spent the day with me ... I have had a great treat in Mr. Erskine - a holy, spiritual, enlightened and affectionate Christian, who is also a₁ man of great property and of great literature.

Chalmers' remark about Erskine's literary cultivation probably refers to his very considerable acquaintance with Shakespeare and the classics. In the words of his friend Dr. Richard Low:

His literary tastes were very refined. Shakespeare was his favourite author among the moderns, and to hear Mr. Erskine quoting Shakespeare was no ordinary treat. His favourites among the ancients were Homer and Plato. He read the Iliad through continuously, finishing about the year 1838. Plato engaged much of₂ his leisure time during the rest of his life.

By contrast, Erskine's familiarity with the theological and

and devotional literature of the Church seems to have been limited, even sketchy.³ The religious authors most often cited in Erskine's correspondence are Alexandre Vinet and F.D. Maurice, both of whom were his friends and contemporaries. Indeed, for someone soon to offer himself to the Christian reading public as a spiritual guide, Erskine was amazingly ignorant of the vast theological heritage of the Christian Church.

Erskine's eyesight, it is true, failed early in life, and this had a crippling effect on his capacity for reading.⁴ He himself confessed to Principal Shairp that this was the chief reason for his not being a learned or scholarly man.⁵ He was thrown back into himself, his own experiences, his own reflections, his relationships with others. And yet this cannot satisfactorily explain Erskine's slim knowledge of theological literature; for why, in spite of his poor eyesight, was he such a devoted student of Shakespeare and Homer, later of Plato? Erskine, I think, cherished an inner preference for literary rather than theological study. It put him more in touch with the range of human feeling and experience, an area in which, as a good aesthete and Romantic, he felt more at home than he did in the severer realms of dogmatic divinity.

To return to Chalmers: Erskine was as taken with his new acquaintance as Chalmers with him. He was particularly struck with Chalmers' humility:

If you had opened to me all mysteries and all knowledge, you could not have brought to my conscience the strong conviction of the necessity and reality of Christianity with half the force that this deportment of yours impressed upon me.⁶

This was written in a letter to Chalmers soon after the visit. They appear to have discussed the relationship of faith

and works at this first meeting; in a second letter dated 5th September 1818 Erskine offered to send Chalmers his own translation of JAMES to substantiate his claim that faith and moral character exist together in a natural relationship of mutual sustenance, good works being but faith in exercise.⁷ Erskine's ethical concern is again apparent; he was to express it publicly four years later in his Essay on Faith. Chalmers responded enthusiastically to Erskine's translation:

I never read James with a more entire impression of the unity of what at one time appeared disjointed, of the significance of what at one time appeared dark, of the pertinency of what at one time appeared irrelevant, than I have done through the medium of your translation. There is a light, and a power, and a moral impression about your performance, that there is not about the version of the Apostle in our authorised Scriptures; and if you can substantiate on good grounds all the reformations that you propose, you will indeed offer a very valuable, as well, I am persuaded, as a very acceptable contribution to Biblical literature. If you have confidence in the soundness of your various renderings, I regard the work as altogether worthy of publication.⁸

Erskine unfortunately did not follow Chalmers' recommendation, and the work is lost. For the moment, Erskine was engaged in writing the first draft of his Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion, which he sent to Chalmers in November. Erskine's interest in apologetics had obviously not passed away subsequent to his crisis of faith in 1810 - 16, and he felt a burden to offer his thoughts on this subject to the world. We do not know what Chalmers made of this draft; but why did Erskine send it to Chalmers in the first place? One possibility is that he was encouraged to do so by their common friend, Dr. Charles Stuart of Dunearn, who had been corresponding with Chalmers on the subject. The relationship between Erskine, Chalmers and apologetics, however, is more involved than is suggested by a hypothetical

intervention on the part of Dr. Stuart. It takes us back to the university days of a young Thomas Chalmers.

Chalmers had been interested in apologetics long before he became an Evangelical. He had gone through a time of religious scepticism in his student days at St. Andrews, but had been rescued chiefly by his reading Butler's Analogy. As an assistant minister at Cavers he had preached ineffectual sermons on the evidences of Christianity. In 1808, now minister of Kilmany, he was invited by Dr. Brewster, editor of the Edinburgh Encyclopaedia, to contribute an article to a forthcoming volume. Originally this was planned to be on trigonometry, but after his sister's death Chalmers' thoughts turned in a more spiritual direction, and he asked Brewster if he might write an article on Christianity instead. The topic he alighted on was apologetics. Dr. Andrew Thomson, leading Evangelical clergyman of the Church of Scotland and editor of the Edinburgh Christian Instructor, had been intending to write up this subject, but gave way to the young Kilmany pastor who had made such an impressive speech in the General Assembly of 1809.

Chalmers studied earnestly in preparation for writing the article, drinking deep from the learned wells of the anti-Deistic divines of the previous century, such as Leland and Lardner. His prolonged illness (November 1809 - December 1810) and conversion experience interrupted the enterprise. At length, however, the article was completed, and the volume of the Edinburgh Encyclopaedia which contained it came out in 1813.

The article won such a good reception that the Encyclopaedia's proprietors, including a number of Edinburgh's leading publishers, advised the article's separate publication in book form. To this Chalmers agreed, and the book was published in October 1814, revised and expanded into a 266 page volume

entitled The Evidence and Authority of the Christian Revelation. This too proved exceedingly popular. Prof. Mearns of Aberdeen, who was later to write against it, said that

under the sanction of a popular name [this book] has been sent more rapidly into circulation than perhaps any work on⁹ the subject which ever issued from the press.

There can be little doubt that Erskine bought and read it, since this was the period of his crisis of faith and investigation of the evidences of Christianity. There can be no doubt that he did not think its apologetic approach correct, for his own Remarks is written in opposition to one of Chalmers' main contentions.

Chalmers' strategy consisted in conceding the entire natural theology case to Hume's scepticism, and simply taking his stand on the historical documentary evidence of the New Testament as sufficient in itself to prove the divine character of Christianity. He argued that there were two ways of verifying a message which had come from a distance:

- (i) Test its content. Did it bear the marks of coming from its alleged sender?
- (ii) Test the credibility of the messengers. Were they trustworthy?

The first way, the way of "internal evidence", Chalmers flatly rejected on the basis of man's native ignorance of God's will and attributes. The human intellect was totally incompetent to decide whether the substance of Christian doctrine was divine:

reason is not entitled to sit in judgment over those internal evidences which many a presumptuous theologian has attempted to derive from the reason of the thing or from the agreement of the doctrine with the¹⁰ fancied character and attributes of the Deity.

This rhetoric of divine transcendence enabled Chalmers to obliterate natural religion as effectively as Hume, but only to make way for the assured witness of history:

for our own part we could see her [Christianity] driven from all her defences and surrender them without a sigh, so long as the phalanx of her historical evidence remains impenetrable. Behind this unscaled barrier we could entrench ourselves and eye the light skirmishing before us with no other sentiment than of regret that our friends [internal evidence apologists] should by the eagerness of their misplaced zeal have given our enemy [Deists] the appearance of a triumph.¹¹

The core of the book is a discussion of the historical case for Christianity, involving such matters as the authorship of the New Testament documents, the marks of sincerity in the Apostles and primitive Christians, the fulfilment of prophecy and the occurrence of miracles. Chalmers dwelt considerably on the miraculous as proof of the divine origin of Christianity, as was customary among apologists at that time, especially those of Paley's school; but his arguments are directed to vindicating the historicity of the gospel miracles, rather than showing in what way they authenticate the gospel. He seems to have taken this latter point for granted.

Chalmers ended his apology with a triumphant and scornful thrust at rationalism, whose weapons he had used against itself throughout the book:

After we have established Christianity to be an authentic message from God upon these historical grounds - on which the reason and experience of man entitle him to form his conclusions - nothing remains for us but an unconditional surrender¹² of the mind to the subject of the message.

Popularly successful as Chalmers' book may have been, its



argument did not go unchallenged. One of the first to challenge its "pure history" approach, even before the Encyclopedia article had been expanded into book form, was Dr. Charles Stuart of Dunearn. Stuart took Chalmers to task (in private) for his rejection of internal evidence, maintaining that this was the evidence on which the faith of most Christians rested. The average believer had neither time nor talent to wade through the historical tomes of Lardner, Paley and company, but he could immediately apprehend for himself the moral excellence of Christianity and its perfect adaptation to the needs of his spirit.¹³ This indeed was the more traditional Calvinistic understanding of apologetics, classically expounded in John Owen's Reason of Faith and Thomas Halyburton's Essay on the Ground or Formal Reason of Saving Faith. Chalmers felt the sting of this criticism, and tried to reckon with it in the introduction to the 1814 volume, where he confessed that the study of historical evidences could not be the sole gateway to faith, since "thousands and thousands of Christians" had inwardly grasped the spiritual truth of the gospel simply through the illumination of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴ But he unrepentantly insisted that the evidence pertinent to a spiritually blind unbeliever was the external historical evidence.

As the popularity of the Evidence and Authority increased, so did the criticisms of Stuart and others. Stuart sent Chalmers some books on Christianity's internal evidence; these included Jonathan Edwards' Treatise Concerning Religious Affections and Andrew Fuller's The Gospel its own Witness. The Evidence and Authority was reviewed in the January 1817 issue of the Edinburgh Christian Instructor. It praised Chalmers for his vindication of Christianity's historical credentials, but took him severely to task for his rejection of internal evidence. "Dr. Chalmers has gone too far", pronounced the Instructor.¹⁵ If Chalmers were right,

We should be prevented from saying that the

Bible is more excellent than the Alcoran, that the Psalms of David are more spiritual and heavenly than the Odes of Anacreon, or that the views given of the Supreme Being in the Scriptures are more rational and just than those of the heathen theology. We should be prevented from asserting the superior morality of the Gospel; for in making any of these assertions there is always a tacit reference to something in our minds as a test of what is true and rational and excellent.¹⁶

The review also makes Stuart's point that "by far the greater part of those who truly believe are brought to the faith of the Gospel by a view of its intrinsic excellence and glory and its suitableness to their situation", rather than by historical arguments or discourses on miracles.¹⁷ Chalmers had swept Christianity away into a cramped authoritarianism.¹⁸ The reviewer sprang to the defence of reason's powers of moral scrutiny:

with all her [reason's] defects and faults,
and in our eyes they are not small nor few,
we bear her so much heartfelt kindness,
that we cannot agree to the proposal of curing
her faults by knocking out her brains ...¹⁹

A similar review appeared in the July 1817 issue of the Quarterly Review, reiterating these criticisms.

An anti-Chalmers broadside erupted from King's College Aberdeen in July 1818, with the publication of a volume by Prof. Duncan Mearns, entitled Principles of Christian Evidence.²⁰ The book was a defence of man's moral consciousness as an organ of genuine knowledge of God. We must know something of God's moral attributes prior to special revelation, argued Mearns, for there to be grounds for recognising that revelation when it appears.²¹ It was Stuart's point again:

it is one of the most unfortunate aspects
which Dr. Chalmers' scheme of Christian
Evidence presents, that it destroys that

species of proof which is peculiarly accessible to men of ordinary and uncultivated understandings. It is not to be doubted that the faith of a large proportion of Christians leans mainly on the internal evidence; nay it is questionable whether by means of proofs strictly external any other faith could in the absence of all internal evidence be produced than that of those spirits who in their present unhappy state believe yet tremble.²²

Mearns also disputed the high place given by Chalmers to miracles in his historical apologetic. Miracles had no divine significance unless rooted in a moral context. They were secondary signs which added weight to a prophet's claim to be speaking in God's name, but the moral purity of his message was his primary credential. This position alone distinguished Christian miracles from pagan prodigies.²³ Erskine and Dr. Andrew Thomson both endorsed this approach to miracles.²⁴

Mearns' book received an almost entirely negative review in the March 1819 edition of the Christian Instructor. The reviewer professed himself incensed by the hypercritical spirit of Mearns' anti-Chalmers onslaught,²⁵ but the magazine had an anti-Mearns axe to grind in any case, since Mearns was a Moderate who had clashed with Dr. Thomson, the Instructor's editor, in the arena of church politics.

The Instructor did not go unscathed for its attack on Mearns. Someone calling himself "Venusinus" penned a sarcastic pamphlet in Mearns' defence in May 1819, entitled Remarks on the Edinburgh Christian Instructor's Review of Dr. Mearns' "Principles of Christian Evidence": with a Proposal for publishing and circulating, under the sanction of the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland, an improved edition of that Review, humbly submitted to the consideration of Dr. Chalmers's friends. Dr. Thomson himself took up his pen to reply in kind.

It was in this context of the broad post-Deistic debate over apologetics in general, and Chalmers' outspoken rejection of internal evidence in particular, that Erskine's book appeared on the scene. We recall that he had sent the first draft to Chalmers in November 1818. In December 1820, the final version was published to the world at large, under the title Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion.

(iii) "Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion"

The orthodox world received Erskine's Remarks with keen approval. In particular, the Edinburgh Christian Instructor, the uncompromising literary voice of Scottish Evangelicalism, published a wholly positive review in its April 1823 issue, which we will examine in the next section. However, as Hanna rightly notes, this does not mean that the Remarks did not contain elements of thought which, when more fully developed in Erskine's later writings, Calvinists would find unacceptable.¹ The only critic who did notice the less than orthodox tendencies in the work was John Henry Newman, a theologian not well-disposed to Evangelical religion, whose poignant expose of what he believed to be the Liberalism of the Remarks was not published until 1835. Evangelical readers, we may surmise, in their enthusiasm for the Evangelical faith expressed in Erskine's first published work, overlooked its less congenial emphases. However, the degree to which Erskine had already capitulated to Romanticism in the Remarks can easily be exaggerated by hindsight. His first book is clearly coloured with an Evangelical and Calvinistic outlook.³

Erskine's fundamental point in the Remarks is to show that the historical and spiritual facts of Christianity must be true on account of the gospel's perfect adaptation

to man's natural awareness of God and his profoundest spiritual needs.⁴ Erskine thus adds his voice to the critics of Chalmers' apologetic method, with its exclusive concern for the integrity of the apostles as witnesses and its denial of any apologetic function to the gospel's spiritual excellence.⁵ To undercut Chalmers' approach and buttress his own, Erskine relies heavily on man's natural inner consciousness of spiritual truth. Prior to special revelation, he argues, general revelation teaches all men that God exists, that He is the morally perfect Lawgiver and Judge, and that there is an ultimate connection of virtue with happiness and evil with misery.⁶ These truths are revealed through nature, providence and conscience. It is conscience, however, which principally interests Erskine:

We cannot have stronger evidence for any truth whatever than that which we have for the reality of moral obligations. Upon this basis has been reared the system of natural religion as far as it relates to the character of God, by simply clothing the Supreme Being with all the moral excellences of human nature in an infinite degree. A system of religion which is opposed to these moral obligations is opposed also to right reason. This sense of moral obligation, then, which is the standard to which reason instructs man to adjust his system of natural religion, continues to be the test by which he ought to try all pretensions to Divine revelation.⁷

This conviction leads Erskine even now to adopt some positions which from a Calvinistic point of view seem dubious. For instance:

Whatever principle of belief tends to promote real moral perfection, possesses^{es} in some degree the quality of truth.^k

If this is to be of any use in a man's search for truth,

it would seem to assume that the idea of "real moral perfection" is within man's natural grasp, so as to function as a criterion for assessing systems of belief. Also the qualifying phrase "in some degree" may well raise more questions than it solves. Erskine does not consistently follow through this ethical line of thought in the Remarks, as he was to do in The Doctrine of Election in 1837, but he does infer from natural conscience more than most Evangelicals would have allowed, arguing (for instance) that a future life can be intuited from the inability of the present life to satisfy the demands of the moral consciousness.⁹

From this strongly ethical standpoint, Erskine evolves a threefold verificatory test to be applied to any alleged special revelation:

- (i) it must be ethically pure - "it should coincide with the moral constitution of the human mind";¹⁰
- (ii) it must induce the recipient to love and to practise the moral law;
- (iii) it must involve a lifestyle practicable in the world as it actually is.¹¹

According to Erskine,

It may be said that a religion in which these three conditions meet, rests upon the most indisputable axioms of the science of human nature.¹²

Erskine asserts that Christianity alone triumphantly meets this test. In particular, it is the doctrine of the atonement of Christ which authenticates the gospel as God's truth. As in Salvation, Erskine propounds a moral government theory of Christ's atoning death. His problem is not how God can pardon sinners consistently with His

own intrinsic and absolute justice, but how He can do it in a way that edifies them. The cross reveals God as both just and merciful: just, in that it testifies His hatred of sin and thus His infinite regard for His broken law; merciful, in that He himself in Christ suffers the punishment of sin in order to accomplish the ends of the divine moral government.¹³ If only we believe this revelation of God's character to be true, it necessarily sanctifies us.

In this narration, the most condescending and affecting and entreating kindness, is so wonderfully combined with the most spotless holiness, and the natural appeals which emanate from every part of it to our esteem, our gratitude, our shame and our interest, are so urgent and constraining, that he who carries about with him the conviction of the truth and reality of this history, possesses in it a principle of mighty efficiency, which must subdue and harmonise his mind to the will of that Great Being whose character is there depicted.¹⁴

This, then, is how Erskine conceives that the gospel evinces its own truth. To the extent that it differs from Chalmers' "pure history" approach to apologetics, we may sum up Erskine's argument as follows. Suppose (Erskine is saying, in effect) we meet with what purports to be a divine revelation, in the form of a factual narrative telling of what God has done for the salvation of sinners. On reading it, we find that it sets God before us in all His moral perfection, in a powerful and arresting way, so that we feel that we are meeting with God Himself in it. It corresponds exactly with all that nature, providence and conscience tell us of the Supreme Being, but presses home His character and claims upon us in a far more vivid fashion. Its purported revelation of God and of His way of salvation is such that, if only accepted as true, it would have a natural tendency to mould the believer's character to that of God and motivate

him to live a holy life in the world as it is. Could we seriously credit the claim that this revelation is counterfeit - that its facts are untrue and its purportedly revealed status a blasphemous deception? Could the corrupt heart of man have invented this gospel which is so full of the God of holiness and truth, and so perfectly designed to draw men from sin and conform them to His likeness? No, says Erskine. The moral and spiritual resplendence and efficacy of this purported revelation of God certify its authenticity. The believer, in principle, needs no other evidence of the truth of the Christian revelation than that revelation itself.

Erskine's argument, insofar as its apologetic method differs from that of Chalmers, is certainly more in harmony than the latter's with the traditional Calvinistic concept of apologetics. As we shall see later, Chalmers soon came to accept this view, thus conceding victory to Erskine in this dispute. However, as previously noted, there are other elements in the Remarks which somewhat offset its merits in this respect. For instance, there is the way in which Erskine's stress on sanctification runs like a warp through the whole fabric of his doctrine of the atonement. He construes the cross almost exclusively in terms of revelation; it is a graphic and definitive depiction of the gravity of sin and the holiness and love of God, calculated to produce a spiritual effect on the mind of the human beholder.

To walk without God in the world, is to walk in sin; and sin is the way of danger. Men had been told this by their own consciences, and they had even partially and occasionally believed it; but still they walked on. Common arguments had failed; the manifestations of the Divine character in creation and providence, and the testimony conscience, had been in a great measure disregarded: It thus seemed necessary that a stronger appeal should be made to their understanding

and their feelings. The danger of sin must be more strikingly and unequivocally demonstrated; and the alarm excited by this demonstration must be connected with a more kindly and generous principle, which may bind their affections to that God from whom they have wandered. But how is this to be done? What more prevailing appeal can be made? Must the Almighty Warner demonstrate the evil of sin by undergoing its effects? Must He prove the danger of sin by exhibiting Himself under its consequences? Must He who knew no sin suffer as a sinner, that He might persuade men that sin is indeed an evil? - It was even so. God became man, and dwelt amongst us. He Himself encountered the terrors of guilt, and bore its punishment; and called on His careless creatures to consider and understand the evil of sin, by contemplating even its undeserved effects on a being of perfect purity, who was over all, God blessed for ever. Could they hope to sustain that weight which had crushed the Son of God? Could they rush into that guilt and that danger against which He had so pathetically warned them? ¹⁵

The subtle leaven of Romanticism may perhaps be detectable in Erskine's thought at this juncture. He appears to be saying that the atonement has no objective or external value - no value to God in Himself, in terms of His own inner attributes. Its value lies in its experimental relation to man. It must be inwardly assimilated by the believer, transmuted into personal reality. The process by which this practical appropriation is effected, moreover, has nothing transcendent or mysterious about it; it is comprehensible in terms of man's inner emotional psychology. If only we believe the gospel, it naturally lays hold upon and reorganises our motivational state.

The Judge Himself bore the punishment of transgression, whilst He published an amnesty to the guilty, and thus asserted the authority and importance and worth of the law, by that very act which beamed forth love unspeakable,

and displayed a compassion which knew no obstacle but the unwillingness of the criminals to accept it. The Eternal Word became flesh, and exhibited in sufferings and in death, that combination of holiness and mercy, which, believed, must excite love, and if loved, must produce resemblance.¹⁶

The crucial role attributed here to belief may be related to Erskine's Sandemanian concept of saving faith as mental assent, which he was soon to unfold in his Essay on Faith (1822). It is a concept which easily lends itself to a highly psychological approach to salvation, and indeed Erskine's tendency throughout the Remarks is to regard individual salvation in natural, psychological terms. He does towards the end of the treatise deny that he intends to teach that

Christianity is nothing more than a beautiful piece of moral mechanism, or that its doctrines were mere typical emblems of the moral principles in the Divine mind, well adapted to the understandings and feelings of men.¹⁷

His explanation, however, is not inconsistent with his strongly moral government understanding of the atonement as a public display of God's disapprobation of sin, aimed at preventing His mercy being misinterpreted as bland indulgence. The sufferings of Christ

were not only fitted and intended to impress the minds of His creatures - they were also the necessary results and the true vindications of His own character ... These sufferings are the foundation of a Christian's hope before God, not only because he sees in them a most marvellous proof of the Divine love, but also because he sees in them the sufferings of the representative of sinners. He sees the denunciations of the law fulfilled, and the bitter cup of indignation drained to the very dregs; and he thus perceives

that God is just even when justifying the guilty.¹⁸

Without Christ's substitutionary death it would have been impossible for God to pardon sinners; the entire moral order of the universe would have been undermined if God had granted a mere unconditional amnesty to rebels against that order. Mercy is possible only if bestowed in such a way as to be compatible with a serious view of sin and a high regard for the importance of the moral law. It was to secure these ends that Christ died, His death being at once a conclusive demonstration of God's attitude to sin and a definitive revelation of His love for sinners. Erskine thus does hold to the necessity of the atonement; but its necessity lies in the relativities of the human moral situation rather than the absolute attributes of God's moral being.

The manward perspective, then, dominates Erskine's thinking about the atonement and salvation in spite of his own apparent protestations to the contrary. His Calvinism is more evident when he speaks of the necessity of the Holy Spirit's work in order to a belief in the gospel¹⁹, but in the words of J.S. Candlish, in a perceptive review of Erskine's life and work:

The gospel [in the Remarks] is too much regarded simply as a manifestation of the true character of God, which, if only believed and understood, tends of itself to impart peace and holiness to men; and while the necessity of the enlightening work of the Spirit, in order to the perception of the truth, is not ignored, much less denied, it is hardly allowed its due weight and influence, being noticed only towards the end of the essay, while the main impression produced by the argument as a whole, is the power of the truth to commend itself to the understanding and conscience.²⁰

The same cast of thought observed by Candlish is evident also in Erskine's understanding of the relationship between the incarnation, revelation and sanctification. The revelation of the divine will through the moral law, he says, is ineffective for sanctification because of its abstractness. But in the living person of Christ we meet Goodness itself in the form of a human being. Through the mysterious energy of personal example, the self-sacrifice of Christ is able to move and ennoble the believing soul beyond what any code of ethics could do, just as the heroic personal example of Regulus did more to inspire his fellow Romans to patriotic self-sacrifice than any number of moral discourses on patriotism could have achieved.²¹ Here again, we see Erskine conceptualising salvation in terms of natural emotional psychology, in a way which certainly conveys the impression that he has replaced the power of the Spirit by the power of sympathy.

From another angle, one could argue that Erskine's moral government theology has taken its first steps towards self-dissolution into Universalism in the Remarks. He does not indeed avow anything like a belief in universal salvation, but there is one significant pointer in that direction. With particular reference to the atoning death of Christ, Erskine says:

supposing the Bible to be true, God was under the moral necessity of His own character, to act as He is there represented to have done.²²

A footnote (not to this statement) in later editions of the Remarks amplifies this assertion:

That God must act in consistency with both justice and mercy, the natural religionist

believes; but how these attributes can be brought into harmonious contact in the restoration of the guilty, he knows not.²³

Where did Erskine learn this distinctly unCalvinistic theology? From his conscience? On Erskine's own terms one could point out that this is not in accord with the moral consciousness of the awakened sinner, who believes indeed and trembles that the moral necessity of God's character requires Him to act justly, but has no such expectation as to the divine mercy. Our reaction to the gospel testimony that Christ was crucified for sinners is not, "It is what I expected." More importantly, Erskine's position (in the present writer's view) is not to be derived from the Bible, which depicts the exercise of mercy by God as optional, but necessary, and therefore not parallel with the divine justice, which is necessary, not optional. The apostle Paul says of God, "He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires" (ROM. 9:18), but not, "He is just with whom He desires, and unjust with whom He desires."²⁴ From a Calvinistic standpoint, at any rate, Erskine's understanding of justice and mercy in God must be deemed to be flawed. If God must act mercifully, He must save all men. The conclusion is inevitable. Erskine was beginning to draw it, tentatively, as early as 1827.

I have drawn attention to those aspects of the Remarks which reveal Erskine's underlying drift of thought, a drift that would carry him ever further from the Evangelical camp. But I do not wish to create a false impression. Erskine's first book as a whole is steeped in the tones of sincere Evangelical faith, habitually employing its concepts and language. It is this, coupled with a facile literary grace, which explains the wide acceptance of

the Remarks in the Evangelical world. His pervasive and catholic faith in the incarnation, his firmly cross-centred understanding of personal salvation, his under-scoring of the centrality of faith, and his enunciation of the absolute authority of the Bible in matters of religion and its plenary inspiration²⁵, all served to counterpoise and obscure those other less Calvinistic elements in Erskine's thought, which with the benefit of hindsight seem much more evident than they would have done to the first readers of the Remarks.

In many ways, the Remarks was the product of a divided mind, in which the superstructure of an Evangelical Calvinism was unconsciously laced with the potent seeds of a broader, more optimistic theology, one which struggled against any limitation of God's saving activity and of man's capacity for free response and cooperation. The process by which the latter grew in strength and finally overthrew its rival forms the main theme of the rest of this thesis.

(For a contemporary evaluation of the Remarks in comparison with Chalmers' Evidence and Authority of the Christian Revelation, reproduced in full, see Appendix I.)

(iv) Two reviews of the "Remarks"

The Remarks, as we have said, was well received in the orthodox and Evangelical world. It was given a highly favourable review in the April 1823 edition of the Edinburgh Christian Instructor, the literary organ of Scottish Evangelicalism.¹

The Instructor begins its review by setting out Chalmers'

objections to internal evidence apologetics, stating that these objections from such a great name must be refuted, in order to justify the praise about to be bestowed on Erskine's Remarks.² The moral influence of the gospel, the reviewer argues, evinces its divine origin.

The preacher does not go into the pulpit armed with arguments from history, miracles and prophecy ,

but testifies to the "divine excellence" of the gospel as being fitted to promote "the glory of God and the happiness of man".³ Moreover, it was the moral and spiritual superiority of the gospel, not external arguments, which conquered the pagan Roman empire, as the apologetics of the church fathers bear witness.⁴ The truth of this method is demonstrated in the Remarks, where

the reader will see that even supposing Christianity never to have had a miraculous attestation, it is true in the nature of things and comes to us irresistibly recommended by its own loveliness and moral power. And when he sees this system 'decked with majesty and excellency and arrayed in glory and beauty', he will be ready to attach himself to it even in the absence of all external evidence.⁵

The Instructor's commendation of the Remarks and its author is of the highest order:

We do not think it possible for any unprejudiced person to rise from a perusal of the book without the most perfect acquiescence in its conclusions. Indeed we can assure our readers that they will not often meet with as much sound reasoning, genuine piety and striking illustration combined as they will find in this essay.⁶

It applies to the Remarks some words of Dr. Johnson:

the scholar ought to read it for its elegance,
the philosopher for its arguments, and the
Christian for its devotion.⁷

The Instructor particularly praises Erskine's treatment of the atonement and his "excellent remarks on the office of the Holy Spirit".⁸ The review closes with the following tribute to Erskine:

We are happy to be able in closing our remarks on the work to assure our readers that we have not often of late seen exhibited in a higher degree that combination of intellectual power and moral sensibility which is the best gift of God and the richest possession of man.⁹

This review speaks for itself. Erskine was accepted as a brother in the true faith by the literary organ of Scottish Calvinistic Evangelicalism. Whether the Instructor was sufficiently discerning in its whole-hearted endorsement of the Remarks is another matter, which can be gauged by comparing it with the very different response of John Henry Newman.

Newman also bears witness to the acceptance which Erskine's Remarks (and Essay on Faith) found among Evangelicals, this time south of the border:

I knew, when young [and an Evangelical] ,
Mr. Erskine's publications well. I thought
them able and persuasive; but [he significantly adds] I found the more thoughtful
Evangelicals of Oxford did not quite trust
them. This was about the year 1823 or 1824.¹⁰

A dozen years later in 1835, not as a more thoughtful

Evangelical but the leading light of the Oxford Movement, Newman penned Tract 73 to expose Erskine as a covert Liberal and rationalist. The book he subjected to criticism for this purpose was the Remarks.

It is a sharp and probing critique. The Instructor's unqualified approbation seems rather superficial beside Newman's searching analysis. Newman begins with a frontal attack on one of Erskine's core beliefs, viz. that the object of revealed truth is practical and experimental, that is, the sanctification of the believing mind.

That this is an object, is plain from Scripture, but that it is the object is nowhere told us; nowhere it is represented to us as the object in such sense that we may take it as a key or rule, whereby to arrange the various parts of the revelation - which is the use to which the author puts it.¹¹

Newman deftly turns the edge of Erskine's contention that a doctrine cannot edify unless it is understood, by arguing that the very mysteriousness of the Trinity (which had been Erskine's chief example) edifies the believer by producing "reverence, awe, wonder and fear".¹² More to the point, Newman makes dark comments about the ultimate drift of this man-centred approach to truth:

The glory of God, according to Mr Erskine, and the maintenance of truth and righteousness, are not objects sufficient, were there no other, to prevent 'the whole system' of revealed truth from 'becoming dead and useless'. Does not this philosophy tend to Universalism? Can its upholders maintain for any long while the eternity of future punishment? ¹³

Newman then turns a critical eye on Erskine's presentation

of the atonement which the Instructor had commended so highly. He rejects a statement made by Erskine in the Remarks that "all the other doctrines of Revelation are subservient" to the doctrine of Christ's death.¹⁴

Now that the doctrine of the atonement is so essential a doctrine that none other is more so, (true as it is), does not at all hinder other doctrines in their own place being so essential that they may not be moved one inch from it, or made to converge towards that doctrine ever so little, beyond the sanction of Scripture. There is surely a difference between being prominent and being paramount.¹⁵

He also brands as virtual Utilitarianism the whole moral government scheme of atonement. In connection with this scheme's advocates, he says:

They refer God's justice to the well-being of His creation, as a final end, as if it might in fact be considered a modification of benevolence. Accordingly, they say, God's justice was satisfied by the atonement, inasmuch as He could then pardon man consistently with the good of His creation; consistently with the salutary terror of His power and strictness; consistently with the due order of His government.¹⁶

All of which, pronounces Newman, is commendable as far as zeal for enforcing public order is concerned, but it has nothing to do with justice.

For Newman, Erskine exemplified "the popular theology of the day" (Evangelicalism), in which the atonement is seen

not as a wonder in heaven, and in its relation to the attributes of God and the unseen world, but in its experienced effects on our minds,

in the change it effects where it is believed.¹⁷

Newman traces this psychologizing attitude to doctrine back to the Evangelical revival of the 18th century.¹⁸ Liberalism of the Schleiermacher type, he argues, is

the result of an attempt of the intellect to delineate, philosophize and justify that religion (so called) of the heart and feelings which has long prevailed ... At length, as was natural, its professors have been led to a direct contemplation of it, to a reflection upon their own feelings and belief, and the genius of their system; and thence has issued that philosophy of which Mr. Erskine and Mr. Abbott [another writer reviewed by Newman] have in the foregoing pages afforded specimens.¹⁹

Newman specifically identifies the "spurious Christianity" of Schleiermacher with that of Erskine and Abbott in three of its tendencies:

1. That the one object of the Christian Revelation, or Dispensation, is to stir the affections and soothe the heart.
2. That it really contains nothing which is unintelligible to the intellect.
3. That misbelievers, such as Socinians etc, are made so, for the most part, by the Creeds, which are to be considered as the great impediments to the spread of the Gospel, both as being stumbling blocks to the reason, and shackles and weights on the affections.²⁰

As far as I am aware, Newman was the first critic to classify Erskine and Schleiermacher together as examples of the same religious tendency. Posterity has generally echoed this judgment. Newman thought that both theologians

were the product of a reductio ad absurdum of Evangelical religion. We know the substantial element of truth of this assessment in regard to Schleiermacher, raised as he was in a Calvinist home and a Pietist college, and never able to escape from their warm emotional religiosity, stress on redemption, and focus on Christ as personal Redeemer. It is an assessment which applies in a very similar fashion to Thomas Erskine of Linlathen. Newman was acute enough to make such an assessment in the 1830's.

(v) James Haldane, David Russell and Broughty-Ferry

Erskine and his younger sister Davie spent the winter months of 1820/21 in the south of England, in Hastings (where their cousin Patrick Stirling had died such a significant death five years earlier).¹ It was while they were here that Erskine received a letter from Charles Stuart of Dunearn, who wished to pass on to Erskine certain criticisms of the Remarks which had been made to him by James Haldane. Haldane, it seems, did not think that Erskine's apologetic method in the Remarks successfully established the truth of Christianity; his brother Robert's Evidence and authority of the divine Revelation (1816) had pursued a strongly externalist approach, with which he appears to have concurred. All Erskine could do in reply was reiterate the purpose behind his own internalist approach. Perhaps more revealingly, Haldane criticized Erskine's treatment of the atonement. Haldane, an orthodox Calvinist, did not take kindly to Erskine's moral government theology, and insisted to Charles Stuart that Christ's death was a real substitutionary payment of penal debt, not a mere governmental expedient to make pardon compatible with good order in the universe.² Erskine's response was somewhat confused:

I do verily believe that the ideas of commutation as often held are not scriptural. As Adam's sin covered all his natural descendants, so Christ's obedience unto death covers all His spiritual seed. Christ died under the sentence pronounced against sin, as the representative of His people: His death stands for theirs, their life is bound up in Him.³

Erskine seems to be feeling after some sort of concept of an organic union between Christ and the church which involves a real participation of each in the spiritual state of the other. Hence his belittling of "ideas of commutation as often held", since these are forensic concepts. We see the germ of Erskine's later Irvingite Christology. However, he states his position in such a way as to espouse a rigorously limited atonement in which Christ dies "as the representative of His people", not all men. Perhaps Erskine's confusion arose from his divided mind, where the old forensic theology was uneasily and temporarily blended with an emergent incarnational Universalism.

In his letter to Stuart dated 1st February 1821, Erskine mentions that he has been reading with keen approval the Letters, Chiefly Practical and Consolatory of David Russell.⁴ Russell (1779 - 1848) was the pastor of the West Port Independent Chapel in Dundee, the church with which Erskine was associated more than any other until 1828. The congregation of which Russell became pastor was established in 1808 by a group of Evangelical paedobaptists who had been forced out of the Dundee Tabernacle built in 1800 by James and Robert Haldane. The Haldane brothers had embraced Baptist convictions in 1808, and refused henceforth to allow paedobaptists to worship in church buildings financed by themselves. The ex-Tabernacle paedobaptists of Dundee therefore formed a new

Independent church, meeting initially in Sailors' Hall, and in 1810 Russell, previously pastor of the Independent congregation in Aberdeen, became their minister.⁵

It is easy to see why Erskine should have found worship at West Port Chapel congenial and Russell's letters so admirable.⁶

Russell's Calvinism was largely of the same stamp as Erskine's.⁷ He held a moral government view of the atonement⁸, Sandemanian views of faith⁹, and gave a central place to sanctification in his understanding of the scheme of salvation¹⁰. Sometimes he sounds like Erskine himself:

The great thing meant by salvation in Scripture, is deliverance from sin itself, and restoration to the image of God. Instead of occupying but a subordinate place, this occupies the very highest part of redemption. It is the ultimate end; and the doctrine of justification by grace forms the moral means towards the attainment of this consummation.¹¹

He even uses the same parable Erskine had employed in Salvation to prove that pardon without sanctification is useless:

Should a man be imprisoned, and condemned to death for a breach of the laws, and should he, while in this state, be seized with the jail fever, to such a degree as to insure his death by the disease, independently of a public execution according to his sentence, and were he in this state to receive a pardon from his prince - of what use would it be to him?¹²

At this distance it is impossible to say who influenced whom, if indeed Erskine and Russell did influence each

other rather than deriving their outlook from common sources. It seems far more likely, however, that any sort of theological influence would have been from Russell to Erskine, since Russell's moderate Calvinism had early been formed via its leading British proponents, Andrew Fuller and Edward Williams, before Erskine had adopted any serious or intelligent belief in Christianity. Moreover, we will see clear evidence later of Erskine's dependence on Russell in at least one area. But it does not much matter. The simple fact that Erskine was closely associated with Russell is the important point. It shows the doctrinal affiliations of the early Erskine.

Erskine praised Russell's Letters highly.

I do think that they contain some of the most striking, and animating, and spiritualising statements of divine truth that ever I met with in human compositions. I hope that they are extensively read, and I pray¹³ that the Divine Spirit may accompany them.

He had some of them translated into French for the benefit of his Gallic Protestant friends.

In September 1821, Davie Erskine was married to Captain James Paterson. This meant that Thomas was now the only surviving child of David Erskine not to have married, and celibacy was indeed to remain the lifelong lot of this laird who hid inside his man's understanding a woman's heart.¹⁴

Davie and her husband moved into Linlathen House. This freed Erskine from the need to remain on the estate in a position of regular oversight, a freedom he swiftly utilised to make arrangements for a two-and-a-half year continental tour which would take him to Germany, France,

Switzerland and Italy. It would be the first of two such trips in the years covered by this thesis. He set out in the July of the following year.

Meanwhile, Erskine was not one to hide his spiritual light under a bushel - at least not in the period of his life with which we shall be dealing. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that he did not confine himself to print (the Remarks, and the Essay on Faith examined in the next section) in the propagation of what he felt was God's truth. Every morning and evening in Linlathen House, he personally conducted a domestic service of worship in the servants' hall to which everyone in the locality was invited, and at which he expounded the Bible.¹⁵ He appears indeed to have improved on this after returning from his first continental holiday, since we find in November 1825 that he was delivering a "lecture" every Thursday night at Linlathen "to a considerable audience".¹⁶ The contemporary to whom we are indebted for this information tells us that she

was much struck with the simplicity and earnestness with which he set forth the truth... Although a lay preacher, we were much delighted with his teaching, which I think cannot fail to make a deep impression. I intend to go as often as I can.¹⁷

Perhaps somewhat bizarrely, Erskine did not refrain from similar activity even when away from Linlathen. In the summer of 1822, for instance, just prior to his continental trip, when he was staying away from Linlathen in a hotel along the Angus coast, he held morning meetings in the hall of the hotel, "to which all were welcome".¹⁸ Was there an element of religious aggressiveness in Erskine's behaviour here? What it at least establishes is the inaccuracy of the picture of Erskine as a recluse. He

was far too socially active for that description to be anything but ridiculous as applied to him.

Probably in 1822, Erskine purchased the chapel of Broughty-Ferry, the sole place of worship in that neighbourhood. It had been built by the Haldane brothers as a preaching station, but was beginning to fall into disuse by the third decade of the nineteenth century. Since Broughty-Ferry was only about a mile from Linlathen, Erskine decided to buy the chapel and restore it to its former use. This he accordingly did, and supplied its pulpit with ministers of various denominations whom he invited to preach there. Hanna informs us that Erskine even preached in the chapel himself on occasional Sunday evenings.¹⁹ We find Erskine writing from Rome in June 1827 to his cousin Rachel Erskine:

Will you ask Mr Greig, as a particular favour, that he would conscientiously, as unto the Lord, and not as unto man, assist my friends in finding some proper person for the Ferry Chapel?²⁰

We cannot doubt that Erskine felt sincere spiritual concern for the souls of those living in Broughty-Ferry, and that he ensured that the pure gospel was preached to them from the pulpit of its chapel - the gospel of the Evangelical faith, as he believed in it at this time.

While Erskine's life was unfolding in this fashion, those others who were to mean much to him in coming days were nearing the places by which history now knows them. The young John McLeod Campbell, for instance, had left Glasgow University in 1820 as a qualified divinity student and Church of Scotland ordinand, and was to spend the next five years awaiting a charge while he studied privately and preached for others. The Church of Scotland

congregation in Hatton Garden, London, made overtures to him after his departure from university, but nothing materialized from this. However, Edward Irving, who had been working as Thomas Chalmers' assistant in St John's Glasgow since 1819, accepted an invitation from the same London church in the winter of 1821 to become their minister. This was indeed one of the rich ironies of history.

"How different would have been the course of both lives, if Campbell had gone to London instead of Irving!"²¹

Irving expressed his joy to his friend of College days, Robert Story, who since 1818 had been minister of the Gareloch parish church of Rosneath. Visiting Story in Rosneath, Irving energetically leapt a gate as they walked and talked together. "Dear me, Irving, I did not think you had been so agile", exclaimed Story. Irving rounded on him. "Once I read you an essay of mine, and you said, 'Dear me, Irving, I did not think you had been so classical'; another time you heard me preach, 'Dear me, Irving, I did not know you had so much imagination'. Now you shall see what great things I will do yet!"²² In July 1822 Irving arrived in London, and in September Chalmers preached the introductory sermon for his erstwhile assistant. In these ways the threads were woven together for the tapestry of Thomas Erskine's future career.

For the moment, however, we must remain with the Laird of Linlathen in his preparations for his first continental tour of 1822 - 25.

(vi) John Gambold and the "Essay on Faith"

Erskine visited Chalmers early in 1822. They spent a few days together. Chalmers records the event in his journal: "23rd Feb. Mr Erskine dined and stayed. I

felt absorbed and not so open to Mr. Erskine's conversation as usual". But the next day Chalmers was less absorbed: "Was greatly impressed with Mr. Erskine's talk about realizing God every quarter of an hour. O heavenly Father, let me do it..."¹

The controversy between Erskine and Chalmers on the subject of apologetics was settled in Erskine's favour. It is likely that Chalmers' change of view can be attributed directly to Erskine's arguments. Even before the publication of the Remarks in December 1820, Chalmers had begun to swing around to an acceptance of the internalist approach advocated by Erskine. Thomas Carlyle records that in a conversation with Chalmers in April 1820, Chalmers tried to explain to him "some scheme... for proving Christianity by its visible fitness for human nature 'all written in us already as in sympathetic ink; Bible awakens it, and you can read!"² This intellectual repentance was signaled to the world in 1829, in a preface written by Chalmers to a volume in the Select Christian Authors series, published by Collins of Glasgow. The volume was called The Christian's Defence Against Infidelity.³ Chalmers' preface shows that he had in principle acceded to Erskine's point of view by 1829:

An unlettered man of the present day knows nothing of its [Christianity's] external evidence. He is an utter stranger to the erudition and the history of the 1800 years which have elapsed since the first promulgation of Christianity in the world. It is all a dark and unknown interval to him. Nor can he fetch a single argument for the establishment of his faith from across an abyss which looks so obscure and so fathomless. Now the question is - may he fetch any such argument from the book itself? When in the act of reading it the word is brought nigh unto him, is there anything within it by which it can announce its own authority, and hold out to a simple and untaught reader the light of its own evidence?

... When this evidence dawns on the mind of the inquirer, there is one striking point of accordancy which subsists between the inward experience of his own heart and the outward description of it that is laid before him in the Bible; and is in fact like the exact correspondence which obtains between the cipher and the thing to be deciphered ... He looks at the gospel and sees there what he can see nowhere else - a something to tranquilize the fears of guilt, to meet its necessities, to bring the sinner, who by nature stands afar off near unto God - and as he feels this wondrous virtue of the peace-speaking blood, he believes that an application so suitable to man could only proceed from Him who knew what was in man.⁴

The only material point of difference left between Chalmers and Erskine on this subject was in the place attributed by each to the Holy Spirit in making sinners susceptible to this internal evidence. Chalmers, as a basically sound Calvinist, saw this work as the intellectual aspect of regeneration.⁵ Erskine, with his growing tendency to universalize and to confuse nature and grace, was not so sure, and in time came to see it as a general human capacity. But on the specific question of the relevance of internal evidence to the reception of the gospel, the two men were finally at one.

Chalmers was the main promoter of the Select Christian Authors series, and it was doubtless he who persuaded Erskine to contribute a preface to one of its forthcoming volumes. That volume was to be the Select Works of John Gambold, and it was published in July 1822, weeks before Erskine left Britain altogether for his continental trip.⁶

Erskine seems to have been acquainted with Gambold's writings - a considerable advantage in writing a preface to his Select Works. Gambold (1711 - 1771) was an eighteenth century Evangelical: an early friend of the Wesleys

(but he later broke with John), member of the Oxford "Holy Club", student and lover of the ante-Nicene Greek fathers, and chorepiscopus of the English Moravians from 1754. Erskine, true to his aesthetic inclinations, particularly liked Gambold's dramatic poem, The Martyrdom of Ignatius; he thought that there was "much in it which proves the very uncommon powers of the Author and which would not have disgraced the first writers in our language",⁷ and felt that its explicit and pervasive Christianity rendered it spiritually superior to Shakespeare.⁸ But Gambold's greatest merit, for Erskine, was the way in which he brought Christian truths to bear on the heart and life.

There is a strong reality in his writings; and oh, it is the great matter after all to have the things of eternity brought into sensible contact with our minds, as present substantial circumstances, producing immediate feeling and action, and not allowed most fatally and foolishly to be mere subjects for conversation or texts for speculative discussion.⁹

A straining after reality; a yearning to assimilate eternal truth into his own inner experience: here is the authentic Erskine.

Most of Erskine's Preface is taken up with theological considerations of a similar nature to those found in the Remarks. He dwells on the psychological process by which a belief in the gospel brings about ethical renovation. The metaphor he chooses as a basis for expounding this theme reveals how dominated his mind still was at this stage by the theology of moral government.¹⁰ How, he asks, can a nation of rebels be led back to obedience to their rightful sovereign? Surely by removing all needless grievances, proclaiming a universal amnesty, giving a convincing pledge of the government's sincerity,

and guaranteeing immediate safety and promotion according to qualification. Apart from the clause about grievances, this (argues Erskine) is precisely the plan adopted by God to bring men back to obedience to Himself. The amnesty is the doctrine of free grace, in declaring which Erskine sounds an Evangelical note largely lost in his last writings. Addressing Christians who refuse to rejoice due to their feelings of unworthiness, Erskine writes:

Ought not a polluted sinner to rejoice that he is forgiven? and farther, it is this holy grateful joy which God has appointed as the means of cleansing and renewing your nature ... If you were called on to rejoice in yourselves, you might wait till you were better, and long you would have to wait: but when you are called on to rejoice in Christ, why should you wait?¹¹

Gambold's Select Works were the first of three volumes in the Select Christian Authors series to which Erskine wrote an introductory essay. A preface to Richard Baxter's Saints Everlasting Rest was to follow in 1824, and to Samuel Rutherford's Letters in 1825.¹²

Erskine embarked on his trip to the continent in July 1822, but we will postpone consideration of that excursion until we have examined his Essay on Faith which was published in September 1822. This was his second major publication, and its contents can be taken as an indication of his theological state of mind as he set out for the European mainland.

Ever since Erskine had corresponded with Chalmers on the subject in 1818, he had been exercised over the relationship between faith and moral character. This concern had appeared even in Salvation, written in 1816, where Erskine (as we have seen) maintains that it is the full revelation

of God's character in the cross which, impressing itself on the mind of the believer, induces him to love God and become like Him. Similarly, the same theme is prominent in the Remarks. But in neither production did Erskine concentrate centrally on the subject, as he does in his Essay on Faith, which presents an extended examination of the moral psychology of faith as Erskine understood it.

Erskine basically takes that view of faith which is usually labelled "Sandemanian", after Robert Sandeman, an eighteenth century Scottish theologian.¹³ This view sees faith as an essentially intellectual act, consisting of assent to the truth on the basis of divine testimony. In a discussion of the difference between faith and understanding, Erskine defines faith thus:

Our understanding of a thing means the conception which we have formed of it, or the impression which it has made on our mind, without any reference to its being a reality in nature independent of our thought, or a mere fiction of the imagination: and faith is a persuasion, accompanying these impressions, that the objects which produced them are realities in nature, independent of our thought or perception.¹⁴

A little earlier he says:

To have faith in a thing, to believe a thing, and to understand a thing as a truth, are expressions of the same import.¹⁵

Erskine's concept of faith probably reflects his own mental constitution, with its bias towards the clear, the rational, the unified. But to explain is not to criticize. The intellectual view of faith is not in

itself a serious departure from the mainstream Calvinistic position. It was Augustine who defined faith as "to think with assent",¹⁶ and Calvin himself, by and large, took the intellectual view.¹⁷ Nearer home, John Erskine (Thomas's uncle), Thomas Chalmers, James Haldane, John Campbell, David Russell, Ralph Wardlaw and John Brown of Edinburgh all understood faith as mental assent.¹⁸ Whether or not this is the true view of faith is a question which can be debated within the Calvinist camp.

Where Erskine does depart from orthodoxy is in his pervasively psychological account of the process of Christian believing and its effects. At the crucial moment in the Essay, when Erskine is discussing the origins of faith in the unbelieving heart, he omits all reference to the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, describing the whole process in natural, immanental terms. We will let him speak for himself. He is answering the question how the gospel can find entrance into the mind of the natural man which is at enmity with God:

The moral principles are indeed diseased (though not extirpated, let it be remembered;) but man has other principles, and through these the Gospel may find an entrance to his heart and overcome that opposition of his will, which makes him unsusceptible of impressions from the holy love of God.¹⁹

He particularly instances "self-preservation, and the desire of happiness"²⁰ as natural points of contact for the gospel.

These feelings exist, and are in exercise, in every mind; and the character depends²¹ on the objects by which they are excited.

The gospel excites these natural inclinations and thereby

induces belief; having been received into the mind, it has an inherently sanctifying effect.

The objects of faith do not create faculties in the mind, which has no previous existence there; but they call into action, and direct and strengthen those which they find there.²²

All man's natural mental and moral propensities are apprehended and nourished by the gospel. Regeneration is thus perfectly comprehensible in terms of the human emotional mechanism, and the link between faith and moral character is complete. No wonder that Erskine feels able to conclude his Essay with the statement:

It [sanctification] is a process perfectly reasonable and intelligible on the acknowledged principles of the science of the human mind.²³

Faith, regeneration, sanctification - they have all, by a tour-de-force, been thrust entirely into the realm of natural psychology. Erskine himself seems to have felt that he had gone too far; how else do we account for a remarkable aside in Section IV of the Essay?

We daily see instances of the Gospel being pertinaciously rejected by those whose amiable affections would lead us to anticipate for it a very different reception; as we often find it embraced by those whose tone of mind seemed most averse to it. And we are hence taught to look to the great Disposer of hearts.²⁴

But what is the point of Erskine's extended attempt to explain faith in natural, psychological terms, if after all we are forced to look to the great Disposer when his explanation breaks down?

The present writer agrees with a number of Erskine's contemporary critics that it was in the Essay on Faith that he first publicly, obviously and seriously diverged from the orthodoxy of even the moderate Calvinism of (say) Ralph Wardlaw. J.S. Candlish states the case concisely:

he [Erskine] had insensibly deviated [in the Essay on Faith] from the line of Evangelical thought in a direction in which, once having gone off the rails, the very vigour and earnestness of his mind led him ever further astray.²⁵

Another critic, the orthodox clergyman A. Robertson, at the height of the Row controversy in 1830, addressed an open letter to Erskine in which he traced his errors back to the Essay on Faith:

The errors of your system first appeared in your Essay on Faith, and at that time escaped exposure, on account of the disguised nature of your statements, and the opinion entertained of you as a Theologian, from your Remarks on the Internal Evidence of Christianity. Your errors were then only in progress, and the truth still lingering in your breast gave a greater degree of plausibility to your opinions than was consistent with their true nature.²⁶

Most perceptive of all, however, was the review of the Essay which appeared in the Wesleyan - Methodist Magazine for August 1828. Significantly, the reviewer says that he was attracted to the Essay on Faith by his reading of Remarks - "which is in many respects a vigorous and useful performance."²⁷ However, he is unable to accord the same respect to the Essay on Faith. One of his chief criticisms is in regard to Erskine's Sandemanian concept of faith as intellectual assent. We will not dwell on this, since this aspect of the Essay is not necessarily inconsistent with Evangelical Calvinism. The reviewer's

other criticism is more to the point. He picks on Erskine's silence about the Holy Spirit as the effective agent of regeneration and sanctification. Erskine, he argues, "makes regeneration an intellectual and sentimental process, instead of a supernatural one".²⁸ According to Erskine;

the whole work of regeneration is produced by the agency of the understanding, or at most by the Holy Spirit operating upon the understanding as our teacher. What then becomes of His quickening influence? How does He also work in us to correct the will; to elevate and sanctify our affections; in a word, to regenerate our whole nature? ... Mr Erskine's theory would be much more plausible, if no evil had befallen our nature except ignorance; but the very powers on which truth must operate are diseased also; and unless they be cured, the understanding will be illuminated to as little effect as the sun shines upon the diseased or sightless eye.²⁹

Erskine has transformed the miracle of conversion into "a natural process, grounded upon the manner in which God has constituted our nature".³⁰

It took a Wesleyan to point out to the as yet Calvinistic Erskine that he had a low doctrine of human depravity.

In the most poignant fashion, the fundamental difference between Erskine and orthodoxy is summed up by this acute Methodist reviewer:

the healing power of the Gospel is to be attributed, not to sentiment, the grand error of the author; not to the supposed moral efficacy of the knowledge of facts, such as the love of God to men, by meditating on which the heart is to be warmed into indignant feelings against sin, and into the love of holiness; but to the 'mighty working' of God in the heart by His Holy Spirit, without whose aid all knowledge,

all mere belief, is fruitless, and all sentiment mere rhetoric and poetry - the crackling of thorns under a pot; a blaze of straw, transient and powerless.³¹

It is difficult to fault this evaluation. One may prefer Erskine's views to those the reviewer claims as orthodox and Biblical, but one can scarcely disagree that he has succinctly stated the differences between them. As the Laird of Linlathen departed from the British Isles for his continental trip, he went with a theology which was to earn the following grave rebuke:

That there are many pious sentiments and elevated views in Mr. Erskine's Essay we acknowledge. If they had not stood in connection with so much error on a vital question, they would have given us pleasure; but, connected as they are with great and fundamental mistakes, they only give the book a speciousness more misleading to uninstructed religious inquirers. The doctrine it advocates contradicts one of the great theological points of the Reformation; and, above all, it contradicts the word of God.³²

(vii) Germany, France, Geneva and Adolphe Monod

Erskine's continental holiday, as recorded in his letters, strikes at least one present-day reader as a somewhat disjointed and breathless affair. Erskine seems to rush from one city and country to another, with only a residue of subjective impressions and comments to show for it in his letters. Something of this quality of haste is inevitably reflected in the following account which attempts to follow Erskine in the different stages of his two-and-a-half year excursion. I have deliberately avoided most of the personal and geographical details,

presenting instead a general outline of Erskine's trip, with a more extended account of those particular facets of it which have real significance for our understanding of Erskine's life and thought.

Erskine arrived in the Netherlands from London in August 1822. He was much taken with the grandeur and splendour of Belgian towns and the "immense height of the trees" in the Ardennes - "They look like antediluvian patriarchs".¹

From Brussels he passed on via Marburg to Cassel to view an art collection, which to judge by his comments impressed him greatly: "a most remarkable place - a fine collection of paintings, some beautiful Italian ones of Carlo Dolce, Titian, and Guido Reni; many fine Rembrandts and Van Dycks and Rubenses".²

Erskine's love of art constitutes another manifestation of the Romantic aspect of his nature. His attitude to the aesthetic was virtually sacramental. This is stated in almost as many words by Erskine himself in an exhortation to his sister Christian delivered two years after the point we have thus far reached:

... endeavour to see God in the arts.
Everything of sublime or beautiful touches
the infinite. You can put no limit to the
sublime or the beautiful; the finest exhib-
itions of them only point you farther on,
and farther and farther until you reach that
Source whence all things flow. You may
see power, and love and purity or holiness
in every fine work; where these are wanting,
really beauty and sublimity are wanting.³

One more temperamental pressure was thus added to Erskine's increasing inclination to merge the natural into the super-natural.⁴

In November Erskine was in Hamburg. Here, his long friendship with Merle d'Aubigné⁵ the historian commenced. D'Aubigné⁵ had been converted to Evangelical Christianity under the ministry of Robert Haldane, whose preaching in Geneva in 1816 - 19 had brought about a small-scale revival; other converts included Frédéric Monod⁶ (whose brother Adolphe's life Erskine was soon to play a crucial part in), Louis Gaussen,⁷ and Cesar Malan,⁸ all of whom will reappear in these pages. D'Aubigné's sound Calvinism was later to prove a source of tension between himself and Erskine, but it probably served rather as a bond at their first meeting. Erskine described his new friend in a letter to Charles Stuart as "an estimable man, a faithful preacher, and, what is rare here, an unprejudiced and unmystical student of the Word of God".⁹ This is good Evangelical terminology; Erskine would not be using it for much longer.

On December 12th Erskine wrote to Chalmers from the Moravian community of Herrnhut. He had mixed feelings about this community which he referred to as "Christian Sparta". On the one hand he approved of its "order and tranquillity and gentleness and cleanliness":

Every person you meet in the street bows,
or wishes you good-morning or good-night
with the air of a brother or a sister.
There is a repose in every face and in every
action that you see.¹⁰

But his increasing reluctance to distinguish too sharply between the natural and supernatural meant that he reacted against the idea of a community founded on Christian principles. He thought it "artificial".¹¹ The natural order was, after all, he felt, the proper one for Christianity to work within.

This letter to Chalmers gives us our first glimpse of Erskine's general response to the state of religion in Protestant Germany. It is significant that German attitudes to Calvinism are what concern him most, a fact which discloses Erskine's own continuing adherence to that faith and yet his growing doubts about it. The passage is worth quoting in full:

In general I find the Calvinistic points in great disrepute amongst evangelical Germans. They do not seem to understand the distinction between moral and natural necessity, and they imagine that they can distinguish between foreknowledge and predestination in God. For my own part, I do not find predestination directly in the Bible, but I could no more separate the belief of predestination from my idea of God, than I could separate the conviction of moral responsibility from my own consciousness. I do not, to be sure, see how these two things coincide, but I am prepared for my own ignorance on these points. We know things, not absolutely as they are in themselves, but relatively as they are to us and to our practical necessities. I understand both these things as they relate to me, but I don't see them as they are absolutely. Arminians have no right to attribute reprobation to Calvinists, and Calvinists have no right to attribute self-righteousness to Arminians. Both inductions may be just in metaphysics, but religion is not a piece of metaphysics. ¹²

Several points emerge from this. Erskine claims he does "not find predestination directly in the Bible".¹³ But he believes it because he cannot separate it from his idea of God. This is surely a strange breed of Calvinism. He asserts that "religion is not a piece of metaphysics",¹⁴ yet employs a wholly metaphysical argument for predestination, viz. its inseparability from his concept of Deity. What happened to the Biblical foundation of the doctrine? Is Erskine attributing more significance to his own mental

intuitions than to the Bible?

He then claims that predestination and human responsibility, taken at face value, are incompatible from the standpoint of absolute truth, but that this does not matter, since we do not know things "absolutely as they are in themselves, but relatively as they are to us and to our practical necessities."¹⁵ Had Erskine, perhaps, been reading Kant? He seems to be adopting a position which enables him to believe in a multitude of practically useful contradictions under the plea that he is ignorant of real truth and knows only appearances. This certainly empowers Erskine to accept allegedly contradictory concepts of predestination and human responsibility; but it also empowers him to believe that one plus one are seven as well as two. In the present writer's opinion, Erskine was driven to this paradoxical position by his unwillingness as yet to cease believing in the Calvinistic doctrine of election, coupled with his increasing feeling that this doctrine was irreconcilable with human freedom and responsibility. The paradox, however, is scarcely tolerable for a rational mind like Erskine's and must probably issue sooner or later in the abandonment of one of the apparently irreconcilable doctrines. By 1832 it was predestination which had been evicted from Erskine's intellect.

Erskine's remarks about Arminianism fit into the same pattern. He seems to be saying that it and Calvinism are two differing insights into the same absolute but inscrutable truth. Once more Erskine acquiesces in a logical paradox. It could not last, and the later Erskine, despite his half-hearted protests against the name, was basically an Arminian in his understanding of man, sin and salvation.¹⁶

Erskine's apparent rejection of absolute knowledge in favour of what Henry Mansel was later to call "regulative truths" reveals again his practical, pragmatic tendency in religion. He says to Chalmers on this point:

I find the distinction of objective and subjective religion very important. Some of the Christians whom I have seen here make their religion entirely an interior thing, ie. entirely subjective. In the Bible it is objective, ie. it consists of the history of God's dealings chiefly - but objective for the purpose of producing subjective religion.¹⁷

The objective exists for the sake of the subjective; and, Erskine could have added, one determines what the objective is by its subjective effects. Erskine's subjectivism was never a repudiation of the objective as such, but a subjective attitude to it.

Erskine closes his letter to Chalmers with a note about Richard Baxter's The Saints' Everlasting Rest, to which Chalmers has asked him to write a preface for the Select Christian Authors series. Erskine seems reluctant to accept the invitation owing to lack of time (!), but in 1824 the volume was to appear with Erskine's second published introductory essay.

The spring of 1823 saw Erskine in Paris. He found Catholic France a poor contrast to Protestant Germany, referring to Catholic religious processions as "superstitions" and "useless public ceremonies",¹⁸ and warmly commending an American Protestant named Wilder for his bold outdoor evangelism among the native Catholics. For the Church of Rome Erskine never had any time; we shall encounter his contempt for Catholicism more than once during his continental excursions.

It was not only the Catholicism of the French which irked him. He also disliked their national character:

The people of this country are much cleverer than our people, but they seem to want sense very much. The proceedings of their Chambers are quite absurd.¹⁹

He also found the French government obnoxious for the legal restrictions it placed on the activities of Protestant Bible Societies. This impelled him to meditate on the conflict between good and evil, Christianity and unbelief:

I think we have reason to expect great and striking events soon. Principles on all subjects are becoming more defined and decided, and more sensibly opposed to their opposites. There will be fewer neutrals soon. A side must be taken in the politics both of heaven and earth ... There is a shaking in the nations and I trust that the Desire of all nations will soon establish His kingdom everywhere.²⁰

Here we perceive the first signs of Erskine's apocalyptic mood, which was to grow over the next few years until it reached almost manic dimensions in the charismatic upsurge of 1830, then to dissolve in the more placid mood of his mature Universalism.

At the end of March Erskine was once more defending himself against a charge of heresy, in a letter to Charles Stuart. His accuser this time was the Genevan preacher César Malan, whom we have met in connection with Merle D'Aubigné as a convert of the Haldane revival of 1816 - 19. Malan, "a very apostolic looking man, but a regular Calvinist",²¹ seemingly had little time for moral government theology, in particular its insistence on the distinction between

natural and moral inability.²² He felt that any ascription of ability to the unregenerate in spiritual things was tantamount to Arminianism, and accordingly branded Erskine an Arminian. Erskine and Malan had conversed with one another on this and perhaps other debatable topics:

He [Malan] was quite frank and most affectionate; but our conversation was not of that kind which could be very profitable to either of us, for we were arguing.²³

In response to the aspersion of Arminian heresy, Erskine outlined to Stuart his understanding of the difference between natural and moral ability:

I admit that no man ever believes or obeys except by divine teaching and divine support. But I affirm that no man in the ordinary exercise of his faculties lies under any natural incapacity of believing truth, or obeying what is just and reasonable, or if he does lie under any such natural incapacity, that it is impossible to suppose that any guilt can attach to him in consequence of unbelief or disobedience.²⁴

This is substantially no more than Andrew Fuller contended for. But Erskine's willingness to admit natural ability, to dwell on it, and make it the sole basis of man's accountability, shows how far to the theological left of Calvinism he was, and thus how very much closer to Arminianism than Malan or the Haldanes.

July saw Erskine in Nice, on his way to Geneva. His reflections on France written from here in a letter to his sister Davie were less than flattering, quite apart from the country's Catholicism and politics. He complains of the climate - "the effect which this southern sun has had upon my eyes",²⁵ preventing him from reading and writing

as much as he wished - and even of the religious state of the French Protestants:

my idea of the sum of real religion among the French Protestants has been considerably narrowed by personal inspection.²⁶

Only one clergyman really earned his esteem, Lissignol of Montpellier, "a true labourer, in season and out of season",²⁷ to whom Erskine made a present of David Russell's Catechism "with which he was exceedingly delighted".²⁸ What peculiarly vexed the manifestly British Erskine was that his French brethren rarely had more than one service on Sundays. "Would you believe it?"²⁹

However, one consolation was the beauty of the French countryside. Erskine was a keen appreciator of natural as well as artistic beauty, and the Romantic in him was stirred to lyricism by what he saw:

I have been passing over mountains covered to the top with myrtles in full flower, and every variety of odorous plant. The air was filled with fragrance, the incense of nature to her God. The sun went down, the moon rose on these gigantic, and fantastic, and lovely scenes. I had many thoughts of distant friends. Oh for a lively sense of the constant presence of that Friend whose love was and is stronger than death, who dies not any more, and Who makes the death of His people an inlet to His nearer presence and perfect enjoyment.³⁰

Erskine could not keep religion out of his Romanticism.

By September he was in Geneva. So were Lords Jeffrey and Cockburn, on holiday. "Harry Cockburn looked so like home, that I could scarce help thinking myself in Charlotte Square."³¹ The Swiss natural scenery, how-

ever, would have banished such prosaic thoughts. Erskine was enchanted by it, and wrote to Christian:

This is a lovely land - oh, most lovely!
My dear sister, I hope you are finding happiness and strength in Christianity, and that you know what it is to be sensible of the presence of God.³² Religion seems to me to consist in that.

It was in October 1823 that Erskine first met Adolphe Monod.³³ This was probably the most significant of his continental encounters. Unlike his brother Frédéric, Adolphe Monod had remained aloof from, and even despised, the Haldane revival of 1816 - 19, and adhered to a Liberal, rationalistic interpretation of Christianity. Such were his views when Erskine met him as a student of theology in Geneva's divinity faculty. The paths of the two men, Monod aged twenty-one and Erskine thirteen years his senior, crossed at Cara, near Geneva, early in October, just before Erskine's thirty-fifth birthday. This was the first of two meetings within a few days.

The results were of lasting importance for the young Monod. His rationalism received a considerable jolt from contact with Erskine's broad-minded Calvinism. We do not know what they discussed, but Monod was still meditating on it a week later, when he wrote concerning Erskine that he was:

a man who interested and impressed me in a singular degree. I saw him again on Saturday, and I had with him a conversation which lasted two hours. I may say that I was pleased with him - much pleased, and that this interview has done me good. He put several things before me in a new light; his system is more moral and more philosophic than that of the orthodox party in Geneva. He somewhat resembles M. Stapfer in his broad and elevated views, and has nothing of that

narrow-mindedness which is to be seen in some of our orthodox people, nor of that hard and unyielding spirit which appears in others among them. There is in him a zeal and devotion which interests me. The result of this conversation will be to make me think; that is all I can say; for, on the other hand, it leaves me, or plunges me deeper than before, in the doubt and uncertainty which belong to my religious opinions.³⁴

The irony is rich. While Erskine was moving away from traditional Protestant orthodoxy, he began to play a central role in converting the Liberal Monod to it. For Monod, he brought Calvinistic religion to life, made it real, vivid, human, and thus took the sting out of orthodoxy. Or, as Monod wrote the following year to his friend Louis Vallette:

I wish you could, like myself, have made the acquaintance of Mr. Erskine, a young Scotchman of distinguished talent and piety. He is peculiarly impressed with the doctrine of the presence of God; he often speaks of it, and in a very edifying manner.³⁵

Monod mentions that John Foster has written well on this subject, and quotes from his Essays. Presumably Erskine had drawn his attention to the writings of the man responsible for his own youthful spiritual awakening. Perhaps they played a similar if less dramatic part in Monod's own development. Whether or not Foster contributed to it, Thomas Erskine must certainly be accorded a place of honour in the making of nineteenth century France's greatest Protestant preacher, as we shall see in more detail during Erskine's second trip to the continent in 1826 - 27.

(viii) Italy and Richard Baxter

Erskine spent the next seven months (November 1823 - June 1824) in Italy. He evidently felt a special attraction towards it, to judge by the length of time he remained there and the comments he made. Almost the whole of his second continental trip of 1826 - 27 was spent in Italy. The beauty of the natural scenery, the ubiquitous presence of the arts, and the brooding ghostly presence of the extinct civilization of the Roman Empire, combined to produce a powerful fascination on Erskine. His imagination and emotional sensibilities were exercised to the full. Not even the pervasive Roman Catholicism of the country, for which he repeatedly expressed his contempt, could detract from this fascination.

Milan, Genoa, Florence, Naples and Rome made up Erskine's venue. His letters for the period are mainly significant for the light they throw on the profoundly aesthetic bias of his emotional response to reality. Sometimes this takes the form of a devoted and loving observation of nature:

I have since visited the lakes, Maggiore and Como, both lovely - how lovely! You know the beauty of the foliage of the sweet chestnuts; but you cannot so easily conceive the effect of a continued grove of them of every fantastic and venerable shape, upon the side of a hill - intermediate spots clothed with vines trained on trees in the Italian mode, and the ground strewn with the leaves and fruit of the chestnut.¹

Sometimes it is the creations of human art that produce such effusions of genuine feeling:

There must have been a most surpassing genius in these old Greek sculptors. It is not merely perfect beauty and perfect grace which they have drawn out from the secret treasures

of nature, but they have transmitted to us their highest thoughts and their loveliest sentiments, all fresh, all living, and breathing as when they first appeared to their own inspired souls, in a form that cannot be mistaken, and infinitely more eloquent and imposing than any language. No words can describe the noble, that union of all that is desolate and all that is noble - the desperation proceeding from the knowledge that her enemies were deities, and yet that heroism which never even glances at her own personal danger.²

Erskine himself, however, occasionally felt a degree of incongruity between his Hellenism and his religion, in spite of his sacramental theory of art. He writes to Christian:

It seems most extraordinary to myself that I can, in the midst of such a world of death, and sin, and sorrow, find enjoyment in marble cut into certain forms, and colours laid on canvas; and yet I really find immense enjoyment in it - I feel almost as if I had gotten a new sense.³

Rome cast on Erskine a spell all its own. He spent five months (February - June 1824) in "This city on the seven hills"⁴, "this capital of the world".⁵ He describes it to Charles Stuart as "really a wonderful place. It is full of history and prophecy - full both of the past and the future; and the religious system which has been concocted here [Catholicism] fills up the sum of its marvels."⁶ Erskine's imagination, his strongest faculty, was stirred to meditation of a grand and sombre order, and the aesthetic tone of his mind blended with his feeling for human destiny and his sense of eternity, as he surveyed the ruins of a once proud empire:

This place from which I write is just a mighty monument of the uncertainty of human things - it is a home for the afflicted and ruined and disappointed; for here they will see the traces of a heavier affliction, and a deeper and more widely extended ruin, and a more unlooked-for blight than their own. Here they do not see the tombs of individuals, but of empires - they walk over the ashes of all that this world has produced of mighty, and glorious, and enduring, of cheerful and prosperous; and they may thus have the consolation of thinking that, when they suffer, they only share the common inheritance of man. Thank God, we have better and more solid consolation than the mere knowledge that we have the whole of our race, past and present, as our companions in sorrow. We have learned that according to the plans of Divine wisdom, sorrow is the seed of joy, and that out of the fragments of this life a higher life is to be formed...

Erschine's one complaint, not unexpectedly, was against the Catholicism of the Romans. Amazement mingled with cool disgust would be an apt description of his response. The Easter day celebrations in St Peter's Square particularly scandalized him, with their "artificial fireworks from St Angelo!"⁸ These provoked the following observations to Charles Stuart:

My astonishment is, that the thing goes on, for all the people seem to regard it with perfect levity; they like it merely as a spectacle, and surely they could easily have the same spectacle without the expense and load of the system to which it is attached. Assuredly there is not a place on the earth which is better fitted to be considered as the representative of human nature in all its efforts, and especially in its rebellion against heaven; and as such it stands forth in Scripture. There we see it set up as the mark of the denunciations of God. It is the great theatre on which man has exhibited his powers, and his weakness, and his corruption; he has endeavoured to do everything without God, and the ruins of the Forum and the Palatine tell the success; he has endeavoured even to be religious without

God, and that experiment I₉ should think is drawing to its conclusion.

Erskine's apocalyptic mood surfaces again here in his spiritual evaluation of Rome and its religion. The Biblical reference is to REVELATION 17. On his next visit to the city this mood had intensified into simmering millennarianism.

In March, Collins published their edition of Baxter's The Saints' Everlasting Rest in the Select Christian Authors series. The preface was by Erskine. It is appropriate that we pause to examine it.

The first five pages of Erskine's introductory essay are devoted to the praise of the Puritans. This is in one sense quite surprising; there is little evidence of Erskine's being acquainted with their writings.¹⁰ But he knew enough and was sufficiently impressed to write the following:

They [the Puritans] were made of the same firm stuff with the Wickliffs and the Luthers and the Knoxes and the Cranmers and the Latimers of a former age. They formed a distinguished division of the same glorious army of reformation; they encountered similar obstacles and they were directed and supported and animated by the same spirit. They were the true and enlightened crusaders who, with all the zeal and courage which conducted their chivalrous ancestors to the earthly Jerusalem, fought their way to the heavenly city; and rescuing by their sufferings and by their labours the key of knowledge from the unworthy hands in which it had long lain rusted and misused, generously left it as a rich inheritance to all coming generations. They speak with the solemn dignity of martyrs. They seem to feel the importance of their theme and the perpetual presence of Him who is the great subject of it. There are only two things which

they seem to consider as realities, the favour of God and the enmity of God; and only two parties in the universe to choose between, the party of God and the party of His adversaries. Hence that heroic and noble tone which marks their lives and their writings. They had chosen their side and they knew that it was worthy of all they could do or suffer for it ... These were the great men of England, and to them under God is England indebted for much of that which is valuable in her public institutions and in the character of her people.¹¹

Erskine admired the Puritans for their religious seriousness, the depth of spiritual feeling which marked their writings, the way in which their whole lives were permeated and animated by their faith. He spoke as someone who felt an intimate kinship of soul with them. He spoke indeed, at this point, as a Calvinist (albeit of the most moderate sort) in reference to fellow Calvinists.

Erskine then moves on to an appreciation of Baxter himself:

In this army Richard Baxter was a standard bearer. He laboured much as well in preaching as in writing; and with an abundant blessing on both. He had all the high mental qualities of his class in perfection. His mind is inexhaustible and vigorous and vivacious to an extraordinary degree. He seizes irresistibly on the attention and carries it along with him; and we assuredly do not know any author who can be compared with him, for the power with which he brings his reader directly face to face with death and judgment and eternity; and compels him to look upon them and converse with them. He is himself most deeply serious, and the holy solemnity of his own soul seems to envelop the reader as with the air of a temple.¹²

Erskine felt that Baxter, like John Foster and John Gambold, brought eternity to bear on the heart of the reader. This was enough to win Erskine's approval since it keyed in with his own fundamental concern.

However, Erskine has two criticisms to make of Baxter, each highly significant for his own thought.

In the first place, Erskine objects to what he sees as Baxter's over-insistence on hell as an inducement to repentance. Erskine himself, of course, was later to reject hell altogether, in favour of the ultimate salvation of all. His position in 1824 was as follows:

It is not to the statement of the doctrine that we object; but to the manner of doing it. Whatever men may think or feel on the subject, there can be no doubt that the doctrine does stand in Scripture and assuredly it does not stand there in vain. We must leave the difficulties with God. The light of the last day will dispel all darkness. In the meantime it must be stated, but let it be stated in Scripture language. Let not man use his own words, and far less his own fancy, in describing the future punishments of the impenitent; and above all let him not describe God as taking pleasure in the infliction.¹³

Erskine prefers to see hell as the natural outworking of sin in the soul rather than an external penalty imposed by God. Christ, he says,

does not even represent this punishment so much under the form of a positive infliction, as of the natural result of the operation of evil principles on the soul. "Their worm dieth not, their fire is not quenched." Whose? Their own - the worm and fire within them. Thus also in other parts of Scripture the state of the wicked is represented as the reaping of what they had sown, as eating

of the fruit of their own way and being filled with their own devices. Gal. 6:7,8. Prov. 3:31. And in Psalm 81 punishment is described thus, "He gave them up to their own hearts' lusts."¹⁴

This is no doubt partially true. But Erskine seems not to take into account the relationship between God as Creator and the structures of creation which ensure that hell naturally follows from sin. Erskine has therefore not, I think, successfully absolved God from being the ultimate source of the retributive process. He has merely thrown it one stage back. But he has not thrown it out altogether. We are as yet some way distant from Erskine the Universalist.

In the second place, Erskine objects to Baxter's failure to distinguish clearly between justification and sanctification.¹⁵ This distinction was crucial to Erskine, as we have seen a number of times. For Erskine it was the joyous conviction that one is justified freely by Christ's death which provided the essential motive for sanctification. Hence he feels compelled to say of Baxter:

we do regret that a greater prominence is not given in Baxter's works to the doctrine of justification by faith; because the peace of the mind and the stability of its hopes and the ardour and confidence of its love must depend on the degree of fulness with which it can look on God as a Father who hath forgiven all its iniquities on a ground altogether independent of its own deservings.¹⁶

The difficulty is that Erskine conceived faith to mean simply believing things which are already true and allowing their truth to have an impact on one's feelings.

We have seen this in his Essay on Faith. Consequently he wished to see the justification of the sinner as an existing truth conveyed to the sinner's mind by the cross of Christ, to be believed as such. This is more or less implicit in his writings up to 1824. By July 1826, he was openly stating it to be the case; by early 1828, he had written his most celebrated and controversial book to prove it. In the Preface to Baxter, however, it is only present by implication, as when he says:

Human systems always place pardon or the divine favour at the end of the race; they would remove condemnation by just making men cease from sinning. Whereas God makes men cease from sinning by first removing the condemnation.¹⁷

How could a sinner believe that God was worthy of his confidence, unless he could be sure that God's attitude to him was one of total forgiveness and welcome? This thought, latent in Erskine's mind, was driving him inexorably to a doctrine of God's universal grace, expressed in Christ's universal atonement, and ultimately to a full-blown doctrine of universal salvation. Increasingly unable to tolerate "ifs" and "buts" in the question of God's will for man, it was only a short step now for Erskine between the strained, transparent Calvinism of moral government theology, and the outright rejection of all conditionality and limitation from the gospel message as he understood it. The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel was to be the title of his next writing. The thought, if not the work, was already in his mind as he left Italy for Geneva in the summer of 1824.

(ix) Interlude : Chalmers, Charles Stuart and A.J. Scott

Erskine spent most of the last months of 1824 in Geneva, and by Spring 1825 he was back in Scotland. It was to be an uneventful year. From a literary point of view, his Essay on Salvation, written in 1816, was finally published as a preface to a new edition of Samuel Rutherford's Letters in Collins' Select Christian Authors series. But nothing much else happened. Indeed, an appropriate epigraph to the laird of Linlathen's life in 1825 would be a comment passed by himself that year in a letter to a Mr. Montagu:

I sometimes regret that I have not some fixed necessary employment. There is much time lost when one has to consider every day how the day is to be spent.¹

One is tempted to speculate on the manner and degree of influence which this leisurely mode of life exerted on Erskine's character, thinking and theology. Is a care-free man less likely to retain Calvinistic views of human depravity and divine regeneration? Erskine's day-to-day existence was untouched by the common hardship and discipline of work, breadwinning and family life, with all that this means in terms of the exposure and moulding of a man's character, and it seems to the present writer that this fact, coupled with Erskine's naturally warm, aesthetic, contemplative nature, may well have blunted his appreciation of the spiritual drama of personal redemption as experienced (say) by a Luther or a Bunyan. H.F. Henderson certainly passed a similar verdict:

he seems to have had such exceptional immunity from the ordinary infirmities of human nature, that though it could not entirely exempt him from inward struggle, or raise him above the need of humility, it may yet have produced that tendency to

one-sidedness that is observable in the structure of his theological system. The moral consciousness out of which springs the full appreciation of Pauline theology, for example, was an experience of which probably he had only a slight acquaintance.²

Erskine filled in his time with visits to his many relatives and friends. He seems to have felt a special desire to see Chalmers again. His letter to Chalmers (who since 1823 had been professor of moral philosophy at St. Andrews), dated 6th May, reveals the high esteem and affection which Erskine entertained towards the great preacher at this time:

My dear friend, I am happy to think that I am so near you once more. There are many subjects on which I wish to speak to you, beyond the reach and the extent of a letter, which I have been treasuring up for you during my peregrinations. Will you give me the geographical plan of your life for the next month, that I may see where I can cross you? ... I have a most cordial wish to see you, for, though I have not given you much epistolary evidence of my remembrance, yet there are few whom I hold so dear.³

In June Erskine visited Chalmers at St. Andrews, where both men spoke at a missionary meeting. Here Erskine put his continental holiday to some use by proffering to his audience an assessment of the spiritual conditions on mainland Europe. One of his hearers, John Adam, has left the following description:

He [Erskine] gave the meeting some account of the state of religion on the Continent, Germany, France and notre Suisse, through which he has been travelling. This morning I was quietly taking my solitary repast when my reveries were broken in upon by the sudden entrance of the Doctor [Chalmers],

who had heard I was partially acquainted with Mr. E., and came to invite me to breakfast. He is truly a most delightful man, and the conversation carried on between him and the Doctor was most instructive; I was a privileged hearer, and merely from time to time put in my word of assent. The current of discourse ran upon the Mosaic account of the creation - the discoveries of modern geologists - the state of Italy and Geneva - and the place sanctification holds in the scriptural system.⁴

One feels a sense of monotony when one hears that Erskine was still discussing with Chalmers the place of sanctification in the Christian scheme. They had been discussing it for seven years. The question of the Genesis creation story and geology, on the other hand, is one about which Erskine has left no recorded opinion. Presumably he and Chalmers conversed on the bearing of contemporary geological discoveries on the age of the earth in relation to Biblical chronology.⁵

It is an interesting coincidence that both Erskine and Chalmers at this time were experiencing an identical spiritual problem. Erskine's letters from his continental excursion are peppered with references to the felt presence of God as the essence of true religion:

Oh for a lively sense of the constant presence of that Friend whose love was and is stronger than death ... I stand much in need of this, and yet I seek it faintly, and therefore I have little of it. Pray for me.⁶

My dear sister, I hope you are finding happiness and strength in Christianity, and that you know what it is to be sensible of the presence of God.⁷ Religion seems to me to consist in that.

We must live continually under the sense of His presence - of His near presence. I am persuaded that this is the very secret and heart of religion. The great use of the Christian doctrines is just to make us acquainted with the character of the great Being in whose hand we live, and with our relation to Him.⁸

Cultivate the high friendship and acquaintanceship of God. Be looking to Him hourly for that rich gift which he has promised to bestow - His Holy Spirit, His own blessed presence in the heart ... I am looking for it, my sister, and I am confident that one day it will be given.⁹

Chalmers' thoughts were running in the same groove:

It is quite melancholy to observe my utter destitution of sacred feeling through the hours of common life. Is there no way by which I can keep up communion with God all the day long?¹⁰

... feel that I live as if in exile from God and in a dry and thirsty land where no water is ... O that I could associate with everything the first great Cause of all things ...¹¹

I would give a body and a reality to our religion.¹²

Should not life be a perpetual sabbath? Is there no way of impregnating all work with godliness?¹³

O my God, give me a realizing sense of Thyself. Be no longer a wilderness or a wear-

ness to me.¹⁴

Both men were seeking spirituality of feeling, the presence of God, reality in religion. For Erskine this was the main concern of his whole religious life, but it seems to have played a peculiarly prominent part in this period, up to and during the Row controversy. It is evident from the above that Chalmers was in a position to sympathize profoundly with Erskine's concern, and moreover to share and echo all Erskine's criticisms of Scottish Evangelicalism in this respect.^{14a} Here we can perceive the first signs of why Chalmers was to occupy such an ambiguous role in the violent and protracted contention which embroiled Erskine (and McLeod Campbell and Irving) in 1828 - 31.

Erskine stayed with Chalmers again at St. Andrews probably in late September. All we know about this second visit is that Erskine inadvertantly left his "coloured spectacles" behind when he departed, and had to write off to Chalmers to recover them.¹⁵ He refers to the matter in his letter as "a trifle"; presumably he owned more than one pair of glasses for his delicate eyes. His movements for the rest of the year are shrouded in mystery. The winter of 1825/6 was spent in the Stirling home at Cadder.

The September of 1826 saw Erskine once more on the continent for an excursion lasting until the October of the following year. Before this second trip commenced, however, two landmark events occurred in Erskine's life. His old friend Charles Stuart of Dunearn died, and he made his first acquaintance with the precocious A.J. Scott.

Dr. Charles Stuart died suddenly late in May 1826, on a Sabbath day. Erskine had probably known him from childhood and it was a sore loss. His consolatory letter to one of Stuart's daughters is worth quoting in full:

I wish to let you understand that my love and reverence for your father have not died with him, but that he still holds his place in my affection and in my gratitude. I have to bless God for my acquaintance with him. I found in him a friend, and a father, and a guide. The intercourse which I had with him was a continual incitement to me in the search after God, and I regard it as one of the talents of which I have to give in an account; and I now feel how negligent I was in the use of it. I did not know a human being on this earth on whose faithful and affectionate friendship I more confidently relied, and he is now in glory - in the second part of the inheritance. He suffered with Christ I believe here, and now I feel a joyful assurance that he reigns with Him. His soul had the mark of God upon it. The desire of his soul was after God, and his business was to understand the will and word of God. I think that it was on the Monday after he was taken ill that he said to me, as I was pressing his hand on taking leave, 'I hope to spend an eternity with you.' Amen.¹⁶

In Stuart, Erskine lost someone who had partly filled the emotional gap in his life brought about by his father's early death. "I think of you almost as a father", he wrote to Stuart in 1822¹⁷; in 1824, "I long to see you again. I have many friends, but few fathers"¹⁸; and in the consolatory letter quoted above, he called Stuart "a friend, and a father, and a guide". In the period from 1816, when Erskine's letters as an adult commence in Hanna's collection, to May 1826 when Stuart died, Erskine wrote more letters to Stuart than to any other single person.¹⁹ At a personal level, therefore, Erskine lost a unique friend in Stuart. More than this, he lost

in Stuart one of the most colourful and quietly significant figures to grace the annals of Scottish Evangelicalism in the Haldane era.

Charles Stuart of Dunearn²⁰ was born in 1745, the son of James Stuart, lord provost of Edinburgh, and was a lineal descendent of the Regent Murray. (Once he stood third in succession to the Earldom). He initially trained for the Church of Scotland ministry, studying at the divinity hall in Edinburgh, but also at a Dissenting academy in London where, ominously, he imbibed anti-establishment principles. In spite of his convictions on this point, Stuart was licensed to preach by the Church of Scotland in 1772, and in 1773 became minister of Crammond in Linlithgow. This proved a painful experience, since Stuart felt he had sinned against the light in accepting a position in an established church. His problems increased when he became persuaded of believers' baptism, and also felt unable to administer the Lord's Supper to any whose profession of Christianity was inconsistent. Stuart was a highly sensitive and idealistic individual throughout his life, and one can readily believe his confession to John Campbell that at that time in his career he experienced "the utmost agony of mind" which often physically prostrated him.²¹ His relief came when he told his troubles to Robert Cook, pastor of an Independent church which met in Edinburgh. Cook's counsel induced Stuart to resign his Church of Scotland living (in May 1776). He proceeded to Edinburgh where he studied medicine, and in 1781 he became Doctor Stuart the physician, a calling to which he adhered for the rest of his life.

The same cannot be said for his tenacity in respect to church membership, for the good doctor's extreme sensitivity of conscience made him a somewhat schismatic individual. William Jay's delightful cameo of Stuart in his

Autobiography captures this unfortunate fact with humour and poignancy. Jay visited Scotland around 1800, and he records the following:

In Edinburgh I was followed by that good and talented, but eccentric, or (at least) peculiar character, Dr. Stuart. He had seceded from the Church of Scotland, but no church came up quite to his standard of scriptural purity and order; and, therefore, it is said, he communed with none but his own servant, in his own house. He always heard more like a judge than a learner. He weighed everything that dropped from a preacher's lips in the nicest scales of rigid orthodoxy, and was never backward to pronounce 'Tekel'.²²

The doctor, in fact, was altogether an extreme sort of person, "always in extremes of joy or depression"²³, alternating between black depths of melancholy when alone and sunny gaiety when with companions.²⁴ He appears to have suffered from an acute form of hypochondria.²⁵ However, his ministry to others as a physician both of body and of soul was fraught with considerable significance: John Newton²⁶, James Haldane, Andrew Fuller, Greville Ewing²⁷, John Campbell,²⁸ Thomas McCrie,²⁹ and Thomas Chalmers³⁰ were among his friends (and patients).

Stuart's relationship with Andrew Fuller was particularly close. On the latter's death in 1815 Stuart wrote a memoir of his friend, describing himself as "one long acquainted with this revered person"³¹, and stating that since 1800 he had "had the most exquisite delight in his [Fuller's] correspondence, and in the intercourse of friendship, which he [Stuart] believes to have been on both sides inviolate..."³²

Stuart indicates his agreement with Fuller on a controversial point in the latter's theology, his distinction between natural and moral inability.³³ Yet he also says

that he and Fuller had a number of doctrinal disagreements. It is therefore difficult to arrive at an assessment of the relationship between the two men's theology. However, we know from an early work of Stuart's, his Present State of Human Nature according to the Word of God³⁴, that Stuart's basic dogmatic standpoint was Calvinism of the Jonathan Edwards type. He also seems to have espoused the more radical New England hamartiology, tacitly denying that infants are personally sinful until they reach an age of moral maturity.³⁵ He and Fuller therefore probably gleaned their modified Calvinism from common American sources, rather than one converting the other.

The range of Stuart's involvement in the Evangelical world of the Revolutionary period is remarkable. If there was an Evangelical cause of any sort, Stuart was almost sure to be involved in it. He was "a promoter of every enterprise which had for its object the diffusion of the gospel"³⁶, such as Fuller's missionary enterprise, and nearer home, the Society for the Support of Gaelic Schools, which played its part in the evangelization of the Scottish highlands. In this latter connection Stuart became friendly with Thomas McCrie, the biographer of Knox and Melville, and earned from him a terse but deeply appreciative tribute at the first annual meeting of the Society after Stuart's death.

In Dr. Stuart [says McCrie] I always found the honourable feelings of the gentleman, the refined and liberal thinking of the scholar, and the unaffected and humble piety of the Christian.³⁷

In his last years, Dr. Stuart attached his ecclesiastical devotion to McCrie, Chalmers, Dr. Gordon, and other Presbyterian ministers, and by a strange twist of irony this "very zealous Baptist"³⁸ ended his days where he had begun

them, a worshipper (but not a communicant) in the Church of Scotland.

Stuart married twice. His first wife was one of Thomas Erskine's cousins, Mary Erskine, daughter of Dr. John Erskine of Edinburgh. Stuart was thus son-in-law to Thomas Erskine's celebrated uncle, the leader of the Evangelicals in the Kirk. This union took place in 1773 and lasted until Mary's death in 1817. Stuart had six children by this marriage, one of whom was the Whig politician James Stuart, who shot dead Sir Alexander Boswell, eldest son of Johnson's biographer, in a duel in March 1822.³⁹ His trial was a cause celebre; Jeffrey and Cockburn defended him, and he was acquitted.

Stuart married again in 1819, but his second wife, Margaret Parlane, died in 1821.

This, then, was Charles Stuart of Dunearn, Thomas Erskine's friend and "father": a complex, talented, eccentric character, an erudite if hair-splitting theologian, a staunch Baptist and moderate Calvinist, a missionary zealot, a man of delicate conscience, forceful opinions and melancholic temperament. He was someone in whom all the crosscurrents of Evangelical life in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries met, and through whom they flowed to Erskine. In particular one cannot help surmising that the influence of Andrew Fuller and New England theology touched Erskine through Stuart. But what is certain is that through Charles Stuart, Erskine was firmly and vitally linked to the rich and varied world of historic British Evangelicalism. The removal of this unique link had a symbolic significance. Erskine himself seems to have felt so; we find him writing from Rome in April 1827 to his cousin Christian Erskine, daughter of John Erskine and thus the deceased Stuart's sister-in-

law, and lamenting Stuart's death in the following terms:

I often feel a wish to write to him, to ask him what he thinks of certain things, for I have no friend now of the same kind on earth. I have excellent friends, but none who takes the same vivid interest that he did in some subjects that occupy me.⁴⁰

Erskine could feel himself losing his theological bearings in 1827 and wished that Stuart were there to consult. But his peerless friend, the like of whom he could not find on earth, his father and his guide, was gone, and Erskine was left to take the first tentative steps into open heresy on his own.

If Erskine lost Charles Stuart in 1826, he gained A.J. Scott. This too had a symbolic significance.

Alexander John Scott was born in 1805 in Greenock.⁴¹ His father, Dr. John Scott, was a minister of the Church of Scotland in Greenock's Middle Parish, and a friend of Thomas Chalmers. He was also a rigid High Calvinist; Scott said of his father that "he might have taken his place among the divines of Dort."⁴² Scott thus had a more solidly Calvinistic upbringing than Erskine, although like Erskine he was to rebel against Calvinism.

Scott proved to be a precocious youth, possessed of a restless, argumentative mind and a passion for literary pursuits. He matriculated at Glasgow University in October 1819, the same month that Edward Irving preached his first sermon for Chalmers in St. John's. Scott may have first met Irving here; later they would be friends and pastoral colleagues. At any rate, Scott graduated MA in 1824. He had already commenced the study of divinity in 1823, with a view to ordination as a Church of Scotland

minister; his dogmatics teacher (at Glasgow) was Stevenson MacGill, a firm Calvinist. Before he had completed his course at Glasgow, Scott spent a session in 1826 at Edinburgh, where he attended medical classes. While in Edinburgh he acted as tutor to the children of someone who turned out to be a friend of Erskine.

So Erskine and Scott met: the middle-aged laird and the student of twenty-one. No record of that meeting remains. We have only Erskine's recollections at a distance of forty years when Scott was dead.

I look back on my first acquaintance with him - in his youthful beauty - and with that rich endowment of mental power and spiritual understanding... 43

In the course of their deepening friendship over the years, Scott made a mighty impression on Erskine. In his own words, "No man whom I have known has impressed me more than Scott..."⁴⁴ It was the quality of Scott's intellect which was mainly responsible for this impact. Erskine went as far as to say that, "Scott is, in point of intellect, one of the first, if not the first, man that I have known."⁴⁵ On Scott's death in 1866 Erskine summed him up thus:

A very remarkable man, of great intelligence, wonderful powers of thinking and perceiving and uttering, and a noble character - on the whole, perhaps, the most impressive man I ever knew - full of every variety of knowledge, of taste, of humour.⁴⁶

There are unanswered questions, however, in connection with Erskine and Scott's first meeting. How far, for instance, had Scott's revulsion against Calvinism progressed? Did he give Erskine food for thought on this score?

We do not know. What we can say for certain is that prior to Erskine's second continental excursion he had encountered A.J. Scott, and a relationship had been formed which was to blossom into a deep friendship, broken only by death, and to bear fruits of a theological nature which would have horrified Charles Stuart of Dunearn, if he had lived to see them. But Stuart was dead, and Erskine had met Scott. The future was set. The Row controversy was looming.

(x) Italy again : Edward Irving, William Law and
Adolphe Monod

Erskine spent almost all of his second continental trip in Italy, whose beauties had so fascinated him in 1824. Como, Milan, Venice, Bologna, Rome, Naples and Albano yielded him their natural and artistic delights. Once more he poured out in letters to others the profound feelings aroused in him by the contemplation of nature:

Oh! it is a land of beauty this - of beauty that thrills the heart. I can weep at will whilst I look at it. There is a deep melancholy in the highest order of natural beauty, and a holiness. It seems to recall the original state of man, and to reproach him, and¹ yet to compassionate him for having lost it.

The situation is most beautiful, and the weather lovely. The sun and the blue sky so pure, and beautiful, and melancholy, and the young leaves coming out: the mystery of nature's yearly resurrection spreading its charm over the earth.²

There are many passages like these. In their midst we also find this disarming flash of self-critical honesty:

I know it must be a great bore to get pages filled with phrases about lakes, and mountains, and blue skies, especially if one's good nature makes it a matter of conscience to read them... 3

At any rate, Erskine the Christianised Wordsworthian nature-lover was evidently enjoying Italy immensely. So was Erskine the cultivated aesthete:

I have been at Bologna for some days, and have been enjoying the Academy very much; these Domenichinos, especially the martyrdom of Sta. Agnese, are the works of a fine heart and a high genius. I would not give the Sta. Agnese for the two best Corregios in Parma, though I know that I am speaking treason against the established authorities in the kingdom of the fine arts. The lights of Corregio are indeed wonderful, but Domenichino seems to me to speak a fuller language to the heart.⁴

Sometimes his aesthetic tastes got the better of his religious instincts:

I have got a very beautiful little drawing of the first appearance of our parents before God after their offence, by a German artist here. It is one of a series intended to be engraved for a Bible. The Deity is represented in the human form, which perhaps you may be a little shocked by, but in that form there is a compassion, and a regret, and a holy dignity, which will soon reconcile you to the apparent impropriety.³

Nature, art, and of course the eternal city itself, stirred Erskine's spirit. Erskine spent four months in Rome, which was a third of his holiday. Once again it exercised its peculiar enchantment on him:

Rome is a home to me, so vast, so desolate, so beautiful, so full of the past and the future, and so cut off from the present. It is an image of eternity ... Oh! it is a place full of instruction and inspiration. The handwriting which Belshazzar saw is to be seen here on many a wall, and ruined arch, and broken column. Man was here taken in all his pride and all his glory, and weighed in the balance, and found wanting; and this mighty queen of cities is now the sepulchre of past fame.⁶

In the midst of these Romantic experiences and reflections, Erskine's central occupation was the writing of a book which, when published in early 1828, would be the most famous and controversial of his printed works - the Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel. The system of doctrine contained in the Freeness was already crystallized and firmly embedded in his mind, and probably had been since July 1826. Its cornerstone was a clear articulation of that eccentric concept of universal atonement which (as we have seen) had been latent in Erskine's thought since the Remarks, namely, that Christ's death in itself and as such effects the justification or forgiveness of all men, regardless of faith, and that part of the essential content of faith is believing that this is so, believing that one is pardoned. However, in the Remarks and the Essay on Faith this unquestionably off-beat theology of forgiveness had been given only a confused and opaque expression. It was to be expressed with the utmost clarity in the Freeness. Erskine had uttered it lucidly for the first time in a letter to a Mrs. Montagu in July 1826, just a few months prior to his departure from Scotland for the continent. This letter relates to the Genevan Calvinist César Malan, a man we encountered in Erskine's first continental excursion as a convert of the Haldane revival who had accused Erskine of Arminianism. Malan and other French-speaking Evangelicals had

lately begun visiting Britain and disseminating their brand of revival religion amongst their British brethren, and the result was theological controversy over the relationship between faith and assurance of salvation. This controversy can be conveniently followed in the pages of the Edinburgh Christian Instructor from September 1827 to February 1830.

British, and more particularly Scottish, Evangelicals were divided in their response to the insistence of the French revivalists that assurance of salvation was of the essence of faith.⁷ Many saw the French doctrine merely as a resurrection of old errors; one correspondent to the Instructor calling himself "Anti-Gallicus" complained that the French brethren had "revived the exploded notions of our own countrymen Crisp, Sandeman, Barclay, etc."⁸ Others defended them. It is, incidentally, in the context of this atmosphere of debate that we should view the controversy about Erskine and McLeod Campbell's doctrine of assurance which arose in 1828. The two disputes were linked by a common theme.

Erskine's reaction to Malan's doctrine of assurance in his letter to Mrs. Montagu was, as stated above, the occasion of his first clear enunciation of his peculiar theology of universal atonement, and the letter deserves to be quoted almost in full:

Malan has been a good deal in Scotland. I daresay he has been a good deal disappointed with many things and persons that he has seen here. Religion in Scotland is too much a thing of science, and too little a thing of personal application and interest. His reality pleases me very much; but I cannot go along with his continual demand of assurance of salvation from every person that he meets. I think that he confounds two things which are distinct - pardon and salvation. Pardon is a free gift without respect of character in those who receive

it; salvation respects the character, and is in fact only another name for sanctification; it arises from the spiritual understanding and belief of the pardon revealed to the soul by the Spirit of God. I believe that I have the first, viz., pardon, for I read that the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin; but I cannot believe that I have salvation when I feel the evil heart of unbelief opposing the will of God within me.⁹

Erskine distinguishes assurance of forgiveness from assurance of salvation, maintaining that all men can enjoy the former on the objective basis of Christ's death. In the very act of believing in the atonement, one believes that one has been pardoned by it. But salvation means sanctification, and one can be assured of this only by self-examination. In other words, Erskine thought that the French revivalists were wrong, but not for the same reasons as their other Scottish opponents. Orthodox Scottish Calvinists like Anti-Gallicus argued that assurance of salvation is not of the essence of faith, because it is by faith that forgiveness (salvation) is appropriated, and this can be known only retrospectively¹⁰; Erskine argued that assurance of salvation is not of the essence of faith, because salvation does not refer to forgiveness (which all men are granted through Christ's death), but to sanctification, a subjective process. The possibilities of semantic and theological confusion were all too real.

The truth is that Erskine's mind was in a state of dogmatic ferment during his Italian vacation. Hence his wistful letter to his cousin Christian Erskine in April 1827, recorded in the previous section, in which he bemoans the fact that Dr. Charles Stuart is no longer available for counsel and guidance. Nor was this ferment concerned

only with the question of atonement and forgiveness, but involved other issues too. To these we shall now turn.

In that same letter to his cousin Christian, Erskine says that he is reading Edward Irving's Prophetic Discourses. As far as we are aware, this was Erskine's first connection with Irving; at least, he is not mentioned anywhere in Erskine's correspondence until this point. It therefore seems that Erskine came into contact with the noble and tragic orator from Annan through the fatally entrancing subject of prophecy.

More than any other single figure, Irving was responsible for the fresh and unexpected popularity of premillennialism in the first half of the nineteenth century.¹¹ He had espoused the scheme with all the ardour of a naturally fervent soul, and his Prophetic Discourses were a major effort at advocating it in print. Erskine was deeply impressed. He described the first volume of the Discourses to Chalmers as "a magnificent book, full of honest zeal",¹² and to his cousin Christian he said, "I think he marks the coincidence of the prophecies and events of the last forty years very fairly".¹³ Erskine was in Rome when he read Irving's volume; the eternal city put Erskine in an apocalyptic mood owing to its Biblical associations and its being the nerve centre of the great Antichrist of Roman Catholicism¹⁴. It seems fitting, perhaps inevitable, that in such a setting the hyper-imaginative Erskine should be propelled into millennial broodings by his perusal of Irving's Discourses. This tendency had been present in Erskine's mind at least since early 1823; in 1825 he had gone so far as to say, "It will soon all be over. He that shall come will come, and will not tarry".¹⁵ But now he became noticeably more fluent expressing these thoughts. He wrote to Chalmers:

I am almost a believer in the nearness of the end, and I like to encourage in myself

any idea which leads to watchfulness and prayer, and which gives a greater prominence to spiritual and eternal objects. I desire to look and wait for the coming of the Lord, and to long for His appearing.¹⁶

To cousin Rachel he wrote:

I have been now nearly three months in this place [Rome], and I don't tire of it, but I have a strong presentiment that its judgment is drawing very near. I know not whether to impute it to the restlessness of my own mind, but my impression is that turbulent times are approaching, that the world's rest is again to be broken in upon, and that destruction is again to sweep the kingdom of the Beast.¹⁷

Anything that brought eternity closer and made it more real was welcome to Erskine. Through Irving's millennial speculations he felt the natural world around him become more transparent to the glory of the world to come. In other words, premillennial adventism was to Erskine an instrument for the fusion of the natural and the supernatural. We must bear these eschatological musings in mind in view of the significance they were soon to assume in the period of the Row controversy.

Another writer whose acquaintance Erskine seems to have made at this time was the celebrated Non-juror, William Law. This encounter was far more fruitful than that with Irving. Erskine intimates it in a letter to cousin Rachel:

I have been reading a very curious book lately by Law, the author of the 'Serious Call'; it is entitled the Spirit of Prayer, most mystical it is, but most beautiful. It is not the gospel, but I think it may be

profitably read by those who know the gospel.¹⁸

On his return to Scotland he took up the same point in a further letter to this kinswoman:

I wish you would read the 'Spirit of Prayer' and the 'Spirit of Love', two works by Law, the author of the 'Serious Call', and tell me what you think of them. I have been much struck by them. There is a great spirituality in them. I really like them much better than Mr. Irving's 'Prophecies'. They are, however, very mystical, and if your taste is much averse to mysticism, you may not like them. But I think that you can scarcely help liking them, such a view they give of the love of our God, and of that intimate, and blessed, and glorious union with Himself, to which He hath called us.¹⁹

The impact Law made on Erskine can scarcely be over-estimated. It is very clear from Erskine's later writings (post-Freeness) that he had been greatly influenced by the non-juring mystic; Law's Spirit of Prayer contains some of the most important ideas Erskine was to advocate in his Brazen Serpent and Doctrine of Election. Law's emphasis on eternity would immediately have attracted Erskine. So would his denial of retributive justice as an absolute principle of God's dealings with sinners²⁰. Law's concept of salvation was entirely non-forensic, inward and spiritual:

For nothing could possibly be the redemption or recovery of man but regeneration alone ... Since the Serpent, sin, death, and hell, are all essentially within us, the very growth of our nature; must not our redemption be equally inward, an inward essential death to this state of our souls, and an inward growth of a contrary life within us?²¹

This was the direction in which Erskine's own thought was moving, and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Law helped him along the way to his new anti-juridical soteriology in the Brazen Serpent of 1831.

Erskine's adoption in 1829 of an Irvingite Christology, with its insistence on the fallenness of the Saviour's humanity, may perhaps be traced to Law's influence. Law's understanding of redemption was strongly incarnational:

... the Son, the Word of God, entered by a birth into this fallen nature, that by this mysterious incarnation, all the fallen nature might be born again of Him, according to the Spirit, in the same reality as they were born of Adam according to the flesh.²²

Although it might be deemed obvious that Erskine derived his Irvingite Christology from Irving himself, the possibility of Law's influence here cannot be entirely discounted, in view of Law's language in the above quotation and his clear influence on Erskine in other areas.

There can be no conjecture about the source of Erskine's theology of universal inward grace as contained in his Gifts of the Spirit, Brazen Serpent and Doctrine of Election. It was lifted straight out of Law. In the Spirit of Prayer, Law taught that Christ was in all men as a seed of new life:

But if thou wouldst still further know how this great work, the birth of Christ, is to be effected in thee, then let this joyful truth be told thee, that His great work is already begun in every one of us. For this holy Jesus ... is already within thee, living, stirring, calling, knocking at the door of thy heart, and wanting nothing but thy

own faith and good-will, to have as real a birth and form in thee, as He had in the Virgin Mary. For the eternal Word, or Son of God, did not then first begin to be the Saviour of the world when He was born in Bethlehem of Judaea; but that Word which became man in the Virgin Mary, did, from the beginning of the world, enter as a Word of life, a Seed of Salvation, into the first father of mankind; was inspoken into him as an ingrafted Word, under the name and character of a 'Bruiser of the serpent's head'. Hence it is that Christ said to His disciples, 'the Kingdom of God is within you'; that is, the Divine Nature is within you, given unto your first father, into the light of his life; and from him, rising up in the life of every son of Adam ... It is God's unlimited universal mercy to all mankind; and every human creature, as sure as he is born of Adam, has a birth of the Bruiser of the serpent within him, and so is infallibly in covenant with God through Jesus Christ...²³

Erskine reproduced this set of ideas in his post-Freeness writings.

Finally, Law rejected the imputation of Adam's sin and the Calvinistic doctrines of election and reprobation. He argued that the only sovereignty that God exercised was "a sovereignty of love to the fallen creature."²⁴ Erskine clung onto the Calvinistic understanding of election until as late as 1832, largely because it seemed to him to be an immediate utterance of his religious consciousness; Law's impact here, if present, was delayed.

The evidence indicates that among the authors perused by Erskine, William Law was his greatest single source of stimulating ideas. Living acquaintances such as Charles Stuart, David Russell, A.J. Scott and MacLeod Campbell may possibly have wielded more influence at different times in Erskine's life, but Law stands peerless

among those known to Erskine only by their writings.

Erskine's own testimony about Law's impact was as follows:

I remember well the satisfaction I felt on first reading the works of William Law. I felt as if I had found a great treasure, for I perceived that he regarded Christianity, not as a system of doctrines imposed on us by God, of which we could know nothing except from the Scriptures, but as the eternally true and natural religion to which all our spiritual faculties are adapted, and the intrinsic truth and certainty of which, though we could not have discovered it for ourselves, yet when revealed we can so apprehend, as to hold it on account of that intrinsic truth, and not on any outward authority whatsoever. I at once came to accept this idea, and have ever since cherished it, as containing fundamental truth and most important guidance.²⁵

Law turned Erskine's gaze inward, to discover the truth in his own heart. In the light of the fact that Erskine's account of Law's message seems to be at least principally present in the Remarks of 1820, it may well be that Erskine had been familiar with Law prior to his second continental trip. If so, we can know nothing about it, since the evidence does not exist.

Indeed, there is no record of Erskine's having read anything more of Law than the Spirit of Prayer and Spirit of Love. However, the system of theology enshrined in these writings and perhaps in other specimens of Law's authorship left a broad and deep stamp on Erskine's thought. The analogy of John Foster springs to mind, whose essay On a Man's Writing Memoirs of Himself had a similar effect on Erskine in his adolescence.

Erskine's susceptibility to the influence of others again meets us. This, however, should now be qualified by

the observation that Erskine seems to have felt such influence only along the lines already laid down by the direction of his own thoughts. Erskine's mind was thrust along a course inwardly mapped for it by his own semi-conscious groping after a theology which would fully cater for his peculiar concerns. The influence of others, although tremendous, was delimited by this fact. It was William Law's unique mark that he crystallised Erskine's inchoate thoughts for him in such a way as to provide the laird of Linlathen with a framework in which to articulate his final rejection of Calvinism.

The acute contemporary critic of Erskine, Robertson of Greenock, noticed the similarity of Erskine to Law, in his Vindication of the Religion of the Land (1830) - a remarkable perception, since it was not until Erskine's Brazen Serpent of 1831 that Erskine began to advocate Law's ideas with any clarity and fluency (there are more-than-hints in his Gifts of the Spirit published towards the end of 1830). Robertson's criticisms are directed against the scheme of universal atonement and pardon set forth by Erskine in the Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel:

Opinions somewhat similar to yours were entertained by the Rev. William Law, a mystic of the last century. He supposed that in consequence of the death of Christ, all men have in them the first spark or seed of the divine life, as a treasure hid in the centre of the soul, to bring forth by degrees, a new birth of that life which was lost in paradise; and that no man can be lost, except by turning away from this Saviour within him. You suppose that in consequence of the death of Christ, all men enjoy pardon, which, if embraced, is fitted to restore them to the image of God which they have lost by sin, and that no man can be condemned, except by rejecting this pardon which has been procured for them. Mr. Law, in his writings, always represents the Deity as a God of universal love, who never can have any will towards His creatures but to communi-

cate good. He asserts that there is no wrath standing between God and us, but that which is awakened in our own fallen nature, and that to quench this wrath, not His own, God gave His only begotten Son to be man. In these sentiments you entirely coincide with him, and the parallel is so exact, that it entitles you to rank high among the modern mystics. Finally, Mr. Law believed in a final restoration of all mankind, after long periods of suffering; and to this doctrine your system has a direct and necessary tendency...²⁶

Robertson's mention of Law's views on the punishment of the wicked brings us to one of the most puzzling features of Erskine's theological ferment during his Italian vacation. Erskine wrote to cousin Rachel from Venice in January 1827:

I have a hope (which I would not willingly think contrary to the revelation of mercy) of the ultimate salvation of all. I trust that He who came to bruise the serpent's head will not cease His work of compassion until He has expelled the fatal poison from every individual of our race. I humbly think that the promise bears this wide interpretation. You think not, I know. Well, the Judge of all the earth will do right. The Lord reigneth.²⁷

To the same correspondent he wrote from Rome in April:

You know the universality of my hopes for sinners. I hope that He who came to bruise the serpent's head and to destroy the works of the devil, will not cease His labours of love till every particle of evil introduced into this world has been converted into good.²⁸

The problem posed by these utterances is considerable.

In March 1824, in his Introduction Essay to Baxter, we saw that Erskine clearly if mutedly believed in hell. In the Freeness and subsequent writings, he equally clearly speaks as if he believes in hell, in the final condemnation and eternal destruction of the impenitent. A sample of such utterances is presented in Appendix III.

From a brief glance at these utterances, it will be seen that Erskine talks about the way that leads to destruction, final condemnation for rejectors of the gospel, final judgment in which spiritual issues are concluded, the penalty of the second death, Christ coming to tread the winepress of God's wrath. He must have known full well what all his readers would take such language to mean. Indeed, it does not seem possible, except by arbitrary exegesis, to read such language in any other but its natural sense as referring to the ultimate ruin of the lost. To corroborate this, one need only point out that it was not until 1832 that Erskine repudiated the Calvinistic doctrine of election, which will be found clearly expressed both in the Freeness and the Brazen Serpent. Election logically requires non-election.

How do we explain the contradiction between Erskine's Universalist utterances in 1827 and his non-Universalist utterances of 1828 - 37?

There are, I think, three possible explanations. Firstly, Erskine might have changed his mind subsequent to the utterances of 1827 and reverted to the traditional belief. This, however, is not very convincing; if Erskine had broken through to Universalism in 1827, by what the present writer considers a natural development of his doctrine of God and the atonement, there seems no reason for a sudden withdrawal from this position into a more unstable

and confused one. Erskine never did this in any other area of his theological development.

Secondly, then, Erskine could have been an incognito Universalist from 1827 onwards, practising a deliberate prudent deception in his writings so as not to prejudice the Christian reading public against accepting other less shocking views he wished to advance, such as universal atonement and Christ's fallen humanity. This is certainly a real possibility. Much later in life, during the controversy surrounding Bishop Colenso and his ideas about the Pentateuch, Erskine wrote an interesting letter to Colenso in which, in spite of his basic sympathy with the Bishop's critical views of the Bible, he rebuked him for upsetting the faith of simple believers. His principle was:

I do not feel myself justified in saying
anything by merely knowing that it is true;
I feel bound to look to its probable effects
on those who hear it. ²⁹

It is possible that the same principle governed Erskine's behaviour at this earlier period. Perhaps he sincerely believed in Universalism, but (like John Foster) kept it quiet, for fear of the unsettling effect it might have if publicised before men were ready to hear and receive it.

There are two reasons for doubting this possibility. In the first place, it makes Erskine a liar. He not only kept silent about Universalism, presuming he believed in it; he openly used language which it is impossible to interpret except in terms of a belief in the final condemnation of the wicked. There is a difference between discreet silence and discreet deceit. Erskine was, I feel, too honourable to indulge deliberately and repeatedly in the latter. Then in the second place, Erskine

showed no hesitation in upsetting people's feelings over other doctrines. He vehemently advocated a number of heterodox notions which called down the wrath of the orthodox on his head. It is difficult to see why he should have held back from proclaiming one more such notion if he really accepted it.

This leaves a third possibility. Perhaps Erskine did not believe in Universalism even in 1827, and therefore neither backtracked nor contradicted himself in 1828 and onwards. His particular turn of phrase in his letters to cousin Rachel ought to be noted carefully. He does not say he is a Universalist. In the letter of January, he says,

I have a hope (which I would not willingly think contrary to the revelation of mercy) of the ultimate salvation of all ... I humbly think that the promise bears this wide interpretation. You think not, I know. Well, the Judge of all the earth will do right.

This is extremely diffident language. He hopes that all will be saved. He doesn't want to think that this hope contradicts revelation. He humbly thinks it a possible interpretation. And whatever anyone thinks, God will at least do whatever is right. This is hardly an avowal of Universalism. It is too tentative, too unsure. The same applies to the letter of April:

You know the universality of my hopes for sinners. I hope that He who came to bruise the serpent's head, [etc].

In other words, Erskine is not talking here about a definite belief. He is indulging in a cautious hope. It is not until 1839 that we have clear evidence of the

transformation of this hope into a positive conviction. Obviously it is much easier to draw back from a hope than a belief, especially when one's utterances are dictated more by emotion and imagination than by reason, as was the case with Erskine. This explanation seems the least improbable of the three. It means that Erskine was guilty of stifling a tentative hope rather than artfully concealing a conviction. This cannot really be charged against him as a serious moral fault, if we bear in mind the disturbing theological ferment he was experiencing in these years, and the deflecting effect of the polemics of 1828 - 31.

In the privacy and quietness of his own mind Erskine doubtless continued to cherish his hope; when he wrote for the public he seems invariably to have put it aside, probably through lack of real conviction, and to have spoken with apparent sincerity the easier and more familiar language of the orthodoxy he had been nurtured in.

The testimony of McLeod Campbell confirms this theory. Late in life, some months after Erskine's death, Campbell wrote to his eldest son concerning Erskine's Universalism, that

from being in him as a hope beyond the Gospel revelation - the development of that revelation - [it] had come to be to him the Gospel itself ...³⁰

First a hope which went beyond the gospel revelation, but finally the very gospel itself: this account of Erskine's views on the salvation of all is consistent with and supportive of the hypothesis we have suggested.

One final aspect of Erskine's Italian vacation remains to be described. In May 1827, Erskine was in Naples.

So was Adolphe Monod, and the two men renewed the acquaintance they had struck up in Geneva in 1823. Monod was still in the throes of escaping from rationalism, and the conversations between himself and Erskine naturally centred on religion. Monod records in his diary that they spent two hours a day with each other, talking about Christianity, either in Erskine's room or on walks or rides through the Neapolitan countryside; that Erskine persuaded him to read the Bible and pray regularly, practices Monod had abandoned; and that they read through Paul's letter to the ROMANS together in the original Greek. Monod was generally impressed by Erskine's exposition of ROMANS, although he thought it peculiar in places:

He explains it well, with the exception of a few passages which he construes or interprets in a way which does not seem to me in accordance with the spirit of the Greek language.³¹

Erskine no doubt introduced some of his eccentric views into the exposition which the logical Monod was not happy with. In fact, with rare insight into Erskine's personality, Monod gave vent to his unhappiness in a journal entry for 25th May after Erskine had left Naples for Sorrento:

He [Erskine] judges by feeling, and proves by imagination; consequently his book [the Remarks?] is a series of comparisons which do not always agree well with one another, besides which comparisons are not reasons. I, on the other hand, quarrel with feeling. I love nothing but what is clear and exact ... For some days, I wished to adopt his views, and I thought that this system of the expiation of men's sins by Jesus Christ, and of conversion taking place in a heart touched by this expiation might suit me, but I wanted to advance too rapidly; these ideas do not speak to my heart ...³²

It sounds as if Erskine was trying to teach his newly matured theology of universal atonement to Monod. Significantly, however, and perhaps predictably, it was not Erskine's doctrinal sentiments but his piety which spoke effectually to the troubled Frenchman's heart. Monod records the following in his journals:

My conversations with Mr. Erskine have convinced me that I need something that I have not yet found, and cannot give to myself. I perceive in Mr. Erskine and others a happiness, a peace, a well-regulated state, a firm conviction, of which I am entirely destitute. I am in a state of confusion and of sin. I feel that I am not in harmony with myself; my philosophical principles are not satisfied. The perfection of the creature can only lie in its being connected with its Creator; and yet (and this is where the sin lies) I have been my own centre up to this time. One should be dependent; I wished to be independent. I wished to make my religion for myself, instead of receiving it from God.³³

One cannot help reflecting once more on the colossal irony of the situation. Erskine was now travelling decisively on a course which, within six years, would carry him far beyond the utmost bounds of Calvinism; Monod was moving in the opposite direction. The two seekers crossed in mid-course, and by that meeting Monod was propelled more swiftly towards the orthodoxy from which Erskine was irreversibly retreating. By the beginning of 1828 Monod had arrived in the haven of Evangelical religion and was preaching it eloquently in Lyons. By the end of the year he had aroused opposition from Liberal church authorities, while Erskine was facing opposition in Scotland from the spokesmen of orthodoxy.

But the irony does not detract from the very real and

deep debt Monod felt to Erskine, and we can do no better than quote the tribute he paid to his Scottish mentor from his deathbed in Paris in December 1853:

There are three friends whose names I love to associate, on account of the considerable share which they have all three had, at different times and in different ways, in the conversion of my soul. I would testify to them my gratitude, now that I am expecting soon to leave this world and go to the Father, and when I am finding all my consolation in the faith which they have taught me. They are Louis Gaussen, Charles Scholl, and Thomas Erskine.

The first of these acted gradually on my spirit by his kindly intercourse, his preaching, his example, and his pious conversation at Satigny. The second brought the Gospel before me, in shorter interviews, under a practical aspect, which was so lovable, and at the same time so wise and true, that he won my heart to it. The third at Geneva uprooted my intellectual prejudices, by reconciling in my mind the Gospel with sound philosophy; after which, at Naples, he gave the last stroke to the work: so far as it could be done by man, by enlightening and at the same time making more thoroughly sad my melancholy, as I contrasted it with his deep peace and charity. I shall never forget our walks at Capo-di-Monte, nor the accent with which he said to me, at the sight of the sun setting over the magnificent Bay of Naples: "Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun." ³⁴

On this Romantic note we must conclude our account of the strangely significant relationship of Erskine with Adolphe Monod and return with the laird of Linlathen to Scotland, where, within months of arriving home in October 1827, he found himself plunged in the most eventful period and bitterest controversy of his life.

III. "THE UNCONDITIONAL FREENESS OF THE GOSPEL", 1828

(i) "The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel"

Erskine was back in his native land in October 1827. It was in that month that Thomas Chalmers was elected to the Divinity Chair in Edinburgh University, having been Professor of Moral Philosophy at St. Andrews since 1823. Erskine wrote to congratulate him:

I cannot express to you how much I have been delighted by your appointment to the Divinity Chair in Edinburgh. I have felt it to be a matter of much thankfulness and much hope. It is the situation to which the wishes of many have long destined you, from the conviction that you have a particular gift for the discharge of its high duties. May the Lord answer the many prayers which have been and will be presented on your behalf on this occasion, and send an awakening spirit to arouse and vivify the torpid Church of Scotland, and employ you as an honoured instrument for exciting and preparing many who may be zealous and wise pleaders for God with the coming generation.¹

Erskine's estimate of Chalmers was evidently still very high. He exhorted Chalmers to publish his moral philosophy lectures, and expressed his wish to pay him a visit in the near future.

Erskine spent new year's eve with Greville Ewing and Ralph Wardlaw.² This fact affords a fascinating glimpse of Erskine's involvement in the Evangelical world of the time. Ewing, an Independent pastor who had seceded from the Kirk, had been a friend of Charles Stuart; Wardlaw was a moral government theologian of formidable power. Both were staunch Congregationalists, which reminds us of Erskine's connection with the Independent chapel in Dundee, pastored by David Russell. This connection was in fact on the brink of dissolution in the wake of the public reaction to the Unconditional Freeness of the

Gospel, but it is as well to remember what Erskine was breaking with in the publication of that controversial book. For the Freeness represented a definite departure from the world in which Erskine had lived and moved up until now - the world which had itself been symbolised by Charles Stuart, and which on the eve of 1828 was symbolised by Greville Ewing and Ralph Wardlaw. Not only Erskine's theology but his social and religious connections were entering a phase of shift and transformation.

The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel was published early in the new year. Although Erskine had as yet not been to John McLeod Campbell's parish of Row on the Gareloch, it is not too much to say that the publication of the Freeness was the first main event in the Row controversy, which was to blaze on for the next four years and leave such a dark scar in the history of the Church of Scotland.

At this point, however, we must restrict ourselves to an analysis of the basic contents of the Freeness. What was its message? Why was it so productive of disputation? And what does it tell us about the progress of the laird of Linlathen's thought?

The heart of the book is undoubtedly Erskine's doctrine of universal atonement. We have seen that for years prior to this Erskine had accepted that Christ died for all men; it was part and parcel of his moderate Calvinism. Never before, however, had he [✓]brought this belief forward in his writings in such an explicit manner and as a polemical assertion. Erskine was in effect quietly throwing down the gauntlet to orthodox Westminster Calvinism when he wrote:

The pardon of the gospel then, is in effect a declaration on the part of God, to every individual sinner in the whole world, that His holy compassion embraces him, and that

the blood of Jesus Christ has atoned for his sins. This is the declaration of God, and He makes it the ground of His urgent invitation to sinners to return to Him and walk with Him ... God so loved the world, (the whole world - all the race of Adam,) as to give His only begotten Son for them...³

Erskine, then, argues that Christ's death for all men is the very essence of the gospel, and the basis of its indiscriminate offer to sinners. Again:

A sinner is by judicial sentence excluded from the favourable presence of God ... The universal repeal of the sentence of exclusion, on the ground of the death of Christ as the substitute of sinners, is the message conveyed from God to man through the gospel.⁴

There is nothing very novel to be found specifically in Erskine's proclamation of the universality of the atonement. Any moderate Calvinist or Arminian would have used this sort of language. Nor again is there anything new in Erskine's understanding of the nature and inner meaning of the atonement. He unhesitatingly endorses penal substitution:

... the Deity took upon Himself the nature, and the penal obligations of the sinner, that He might consistently with justice, restore his forfeited life, and remove the barrier which the offended law had placed between him and the throne of grace...⁵

God manifest in the flesh, becomes the representative of sinners. He takes upon Himself their nature and the consequences of their rebellion; that He might show Himself just, even when justifying the ungodly; and that He might show Himself gracious, even when punishing sin.⁶

... we find in these verses [ROM.6.1-7]
only a most direct and explicit assertion
of the substitution of Christ in the place
of the guilty ...⁷

Shall we continue under the sentence of
exclusion from His presence until some change
be wrought on our own mind in addition to
the atonement of Christ? No: all the
satisfaction for sin that the justice of
God requires has been made already.⁸

Thus far, Erskine seems simply to be espousing the substitutionary death of Christ for all men, which however inconsistent with Westminster Calvinism was scarcely likely to provoke the bitter controversy it actually did provoke. But there is indeed far more to Erskine's concept of an unlimited atonement than this. It is part of Erskine's burden in the Freeness to maintain not only that Christ died as substitute for all men, but also that all men are actually pardoned or forgiven in connection with His death - "universal pardon", as the idea came to be called. It is, unfortunately, an elusive idea to grasp. First let us hear Erskine articulating it:

It appears to me that the testimony of the Bible is, that sinners ARE pardoned for Christ's sake....⁹

When you read, that men are saved by faith, it does not mean that they are pardoned on account of faith, or by their faith; no, its meaning is far different; it means that they are pardoned already, before they thought of it ...¹⁰

I conceive all men to be in this state, that all are forgiven...¹¹

A universal amnesty is the subject of the Divine testimony ... Pardon is entirely irrespective of all the varieties of human character, it belongs to man as a sinner.¹²

The limitation then is not in the pardon, but in the belief of the pardon. All are pardoned, but believers are a little flock.¹³

Erskine illustrates his meaning with a parable:

A son outrages in a most atrocious manner, the feelings of his father. The father banishes him from his house, after pronouncing a malediction on him. The son hears of his death soon after, and feels his spirit burdened with the curse; he cannot shake himself free of it, - he is a miserable wretch. A friend of his father comes to him and tells him, that he had seen his father a few hours before his death, and that he had heard him express the warmest affection for him, and the deepest regret for what had taken place between them; and that he had received from him a charge to tell him, that he had withdrawn his curse, and had prayed a blessing on him. The son receives the intelligence with grateful joy, and his burden drops from him. He is saved by faith. His mind is healed by believing the information which has been given him. His father's forgiveness is not given him as a reward of his believing this history - but unless he believes it, the forgiveness is quite useless to him - he will continue to feel his father's curse clinging to him.

But let me now here suppose for a moment, that the friend, instead of simply relating to him the fact of his father's forgiveness, had put the whole history into the form under which the gospel is very often preached:- Suppose he had said to him, your father has forgiven you, if you believe in my testimony of his forgiveness; but if you cannot do this, there is no forgiveness for you. One can easily imagine the perplexity into

which the son would be thrown by such an announcement. It would appear to him as if the truth of a past fact depended on the state of his feeling with regard to it. It would be impossible for him, in such circumstances, to believe, because his informant actually told him that his belief of the pardon must precede the existence of the pardon.¹⁴

The leading idea of the Freeness, then, is clear: Jesus Christ died in place of all sinners, and this fact assures all sinners that they are pardoned for all their sins. To believe the gospel means to believe that one is already forgiven.

Confusion reigns, however, when one pauses to ask precisely what Erskine means by "pardon". He knew full well that its conventional meaning in theology was the remission of sin's penalty. Yet his own definition appears to deny this:

Indeed, the penalties are not cancelled - death still remains, and man toils and sweats still on the outside of Eden. The pardon in the gospel meets the penalties of the law, not by cancelling them, but by associating them with gifts and promises which disarm them of their terrors. Death remains, but there is a promise of a new and endless life beyond the grave,[etc].¹⁵

It seems, therefore, that pardon in Erskine's scheme does not mean remission of penalty. What then does it mean? Erskine attempts several delineations of it, but they are not all consistent with each other or with his previous peremptory denial that pardon means remission. For instance, he defines it in one place as an eternal attribute of God's being:

In short, I am led to regard the pardon of the gospel as another name for holy compassion, that divine attribute for the manifestation of which I believe this world was created, and thus as a part of the unchangeable character of God, rather than as a particular act.¹⁶

In another place he defines pardon as the free offer of the gospel:

The pardon therefore is not so much a particular act, as a manifestation of God opening the inviting arms of His love to perishing sinners, and urging them to come to Him, that they may have life.¹⁷

He brings together elsewhere, by a revealing analogy, Christ's death and forgiveness as an eternal attribute of God:

If I had offended a friend, and if I found that, even before I had made up my mind to ask his forgiveness, he had risked his life for my sake, I might go immediately to confess my fault, but assuredly I should ask his pardon rather as acknowledging my offence, than as expressing any doubt of his having already forgiven me. The risk of his life proved the gift of his love, and I should conclude, that the greater gift of love included necessarily the lesser gift of forgiveness, and I should feel that I was doing wrong to that love, if I even harboured a suspicion that he had an unforgiving thought of me. And this is precisely God's argument against the fears and suspicions of man. God commendeth His love to us, in that whilst we were enemies, He gave His Son for us.¹⁸

From these passages it seems to follow that Erskine's definition of pardon is simply God's love for all sinners, a love which has not been extinguished by their sin and which is revealed in the sufferings of Christ.

The question arises: if pardon does not mean penal remission, and if "the penalties are not removed"¹⁹, what becomes of Erskine's penal substitutionary doctrine of the atonement? And if Erskine is now denying this doctrine, in spite of having asserted it in the same book, in what way is Christ's death a revelation of God's love? Why did Christ have to die in order to reveal God's love?

Here we are faced with one of the most frustrating aspects of the Freeness viz. its disregard for logical sequence of thought. A possible explanation of its inconsistencies will be offered a little later.

First of all, however, we must investigate the central contradiction of the book, found as it is in the very heart of its message about pardon.

For elsewhere in the Freeness there can be no doubt that Erskine interprets pardon not as an eternal attitude of God, but as penal remission secured in history by the death of Christ. Commenting on the first seven verses of ROMANS 6, Erskine says:

Their single object is to show that condemnation is perfectly exhausted and finished²⁰ by the representative sacrifice of Christ.

But what is this if it is not penal remission, since a state of condemnation is the legal consequence of sin? And is this not the traditional definition of pardon? Consider also the following passages:

But what is the meaning of pardon, unless there are rewards and punishments? The very idea of pardon supposes the existence of law and condemnation. Yes, to be sure, it does. Christianity is a remedial system ingrafted on a system of law. When man was originally created, the alternatives

of life and death were set before him, as the consequences of obedience and disobedience to the divine command, - that is to say, he was placed under a system of law. He disobeyed, and incurred the penalty ... It was then that the mercy of God proclaimed the gospel, - a gracious dispensation which had respect both to the external or judicial penalty which had been incurred, and to the spiritual disease from which the offence had proceeded: for the view of the divine character, which it gives in the plan adopted for the deliverance from the external penalty, becomes the spiritual remedy, which, when truly received, works the cure of the spiritual disease, and produces heaven in the soul.²¹

The punishment of sin, was exclusion from the favourable presence of God; and the gospel cancels this exclusion, by declaring peace on earth, and goodwill towards men.²²

No obstacle whatever, remains between God and man, the blood of the everlasting covenant - that blood, which cleanseth from all sin, has been shed and sprinkled, the doors which barred the favourable presence of God, from the guilty, have been thrown wide ... it means that they are pardoned already, before they thought of it; that the sentence of exclusion has been reversed ... The reversal of the sentence of exclusion, which I here consider to be pardon, is universal.²³

A strikingly different notion of pardon confronts us here. Here, pardon means the remission of the penalty of exclusion from God's presence as the judicial consequence of sin. Pardon precedes faith and is universal: on this, Erskine is clear. But he appears to be completely inconsistent as to the nature and source of pardon, contending at one moment that it is an eternal truth of God's being, and at another that it is the remission of penalty

purchased in time by Christ's substitutionary death.

One can account for this paradox, as for other anomalies in Erskine's theology up to now, by the hypothesis that there were in fact two distinct theologies in his mind - a theology of forensic Calvinism, and a theology of God's universal fatherhood and grace. We see now one, now the other, according as Erskine speaks of pardon in penal terms or in terms of an eternal fact in the divine character. We have had occasion to remark on the inner struggle between these two theologies before²⁴, but it surfaces with unparalleled explicitness in the Freeness, which not very surprisingly was the book that first earned Erskine his reputation as a heretic.

It is fascinating, with regard to Erskine's more Liberal strain, to note the strange resemblances the theology of the Freeness bears to hyper-Calvinism. In both perspectives we see an endeavour to throw God's dealings with men back into eternity past, to remove real constitutive significance from divine acts in salvation history, although for different reasons - Erskine, to remove all ifs and buts from God's will toward man by construing forgiveness as an eternal reality; hyper-Calvinism, to safeguard God's sovereignty from historical contingency. One area where the two share common ground is in their doctrine of justification. It is quite ironic that Erskine in the Freeness uses the old hyper-Calvinist argument that justification by faith means justification in foro conscientiae, rather than in the objective sphere of divine justice. For faced with texts such as ROM. 3:28, ROM. 5:1 and GAL. 2:16, which assert that sinners are justified by faith, Erskine repeatedly argues that justification here does not mean forgiveness (since then forgiveness would be contingent on faith and not, as Erskine wanted, a fact prior to faith), but a sense of

forgiveness, a subjective consciousness of having been forgiven:

I have sometimes been led to think, that justification is often used to signify, not pardon, but a sense of pardon, and that therefore, it is so much connected with faith. 'Being justified by faith, we have peace with God.'²⁵

I know that justification is generally considered to mean pardon, or the imputation of Christ's righteousness, and I believe that very frequently it has this meaning in the Bible. But yet I am persuaded, by reasons which I shall afterwards explain, that it also bears the meaning which I am now attributing to it, namely, a sense of pardon, or of the imputation of Christ's righteousness, or having the conscience purged of guilt; and that justification by faith is a sense of pardon arising from a belief of that accepted propitiation which has been made for the sins of the whole world.²⁶

Justification, then, is not pardon simply, but pardon known and believed, - pardon implied in and inferred from a gift greater than pardon. ROM. iii.20, 'By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.' The knowledge of sin, or the sense of sin is placed in direct antithesis to justification, which therefore ought to mean a sense of pardon.²⁷

Compare this with the reasoning of the eighteenth century English hyper-Calvinist John Gill in his Body of Divinity. Gill contends that justification has a double meaning. The elect are justified or pardoned by God's decree from all eternity, but the meritorious ground of this justification is Christ's death retrospectively applied. This is analogous^{to} Erskine's dual conception of pardon as an eternal truth in God and penal remission in Christ.

Justification by faith, Gill asserts, is simply the inner realisation by the elect that God has already justified them:

... those scriptures which speak of justification, through and by faith, do not militate against, or disprove justification before faith; for though justification by and before faith differ, yet they are not opposite and contradictory. They differ, the one being an immanent act in God, all which sort of acts are eternal, and so before faith; the other being a transient declarative act, terminating on the conscience of the believer; and so is by and through faith, and follows it ... at most, they [texts speaking of justification by faith] can only be understood as speaking of faith as a prerequisite to the knowledge and comfort of it, and to a claim of interest in it...²⁸

This is parallel to Erskine's insistence that a man is indeed pardoned before faith, but enjoys no inner comfort from this truth until he believes it. The style of thought in Gill and Erskine is thus very similar, owing to their common concern to secure a God-centred givenness in regard to man's salvation, albeit for different reasons which led Gill to limit this to the elect and Erskine to throw it open to all. How ironic and paradoxical, then, that in his declension from Calvinism Erskine should be found speaking the language of a hyper-Calvinist!

Erskine valued the ideas of universal atonement and pardon because they enshrined his belief that unless men were convinced that God loved them, they would not be able to trust Him. We have already seen this belief operating in some of his previous writings.²⁹ In the Freeness, this conviction is the shaping force behind all Erskine's attempts to bring out the universality of the gospel. He states it thus:

... nothing but a conviction of God's kindly disposition towards sinners will ever lead a sinner into the presence of God.³⁰

This is the heart of the matter. Erskine felt that sinners could not trust or love God, that God could not inspire confidence or affection in them, unless they could know His attitude towards them to be one of unmitigated grace and acceptance. The laird of Linlathen had grown intolerant towards anything conditional or contingent in God's will for men, and felt he had to assert that God, for His part, was entirely friendly and open, and that the only barrier lay in man's selfish fears and delusions. It is for this reason that Erskine defines the gospel as "God opening the inviting arms of His love to perishing sinners"³¹, viz. to all sinners, without conditions or qualifications, ifs or buts.

The heart cannot be bribed to love, by anything except the real or apparent amiableness of the object ... It is impossible that such a love as this can exist in a heart that feels the weight of unpardoned sin, and that regards God as an offended governor and condemning judge. An assurance of forgiveness must precede confidence; and what love can there be without confidence?³²

Erskine felt that traditional theology, with its teaching that a sinner is not forgiven until he exercises faith, placed a psychological barrier between the sinner and God which impeded the exercise of faith. There must be no barriers, no conditions, no uncertainties; God must be seen to be unreservedly welcoming to sinners; hence, God must be seen as pardoning all sinners prior to faith.

Another question arises here: what becomes of Erskine's

doctrine of election? Must there not at least be uncertainty here? For no unbelieving sinner can know his election from the announcements of the gospel. Therefore he cannot know, prior to faith, whether he is embraced in the special, saving love of God. Considerations such as these were soon to impel Erskine to abandon the Calvinistic doctrine of election altogether. The doctrine appears, however, in the Freeness: modified and coloured with hesitation, but still unmistakably the doctrine of unconditional personal election as Erskine had held it since he first began writing in 1816.

All are pardoned, but believers are a little flock. Why is this? This is the great mystery in religion. Here we pass into the infinite, and are lost. One is taken, and another left. One heart is made to hear the voice of God, and learns from that teaching voice, what flesh and blood cannot reveal, - another reads the Bible, and hears sermons, and goes through the forms of prayer, and seems even to long after spiritual religion; and yet he continues a stranger to spiritual communion with God. What is the meaning of this? God is the Great King in all the earth. - He doth what seemeth Him good. But He has promised the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. And yet the very disposition to ask them is His own gift. But the language of the Bible, in inviting sinners to God, is so free, that we must either suppose that there is a deception in the Bible, or we must suppose that every man has the power of coming to God, if he chooses. Let us bow before Him, whose thoughts, although above our thoughts, and whose ways, although above our ways, are yet thoughts and ways of everlasting love towards our fallen race. We are of yesterday and know nothing. Let us look unto Him, and He will save us. The way is open.³³

Erskine manifestly ascribes personal salvation to the sovereign will of God who "doth what seemeth Him good." But he qualifies this ascription in two ways. Firstly,

he uses the Fullerite language of moral ability/inability in a rather confusing fashion:

He doth what seemeth Him good. But He has promised the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. And yet the very disposition to ask them is His own gift. But the language of the Bible, in inviting sinners to God, is so free, that we must either suppose that there is a deception in the Bible, or we must suppose that every man has the power of coming to God, if he chooses.

Is this not the language of confusion and inner struggle? "But ... And yet ... But ..." And what does it mean to say that a man has the power of coming to God if he chooses? The whole controversy about free-will is precisely whether a sinner will choose to come to God unless God draws him.

Secondly, Erskine qualifies his assertion of election by an appeal to mystery.

This is the great mystery in religion.
Here we pass into the infinite, and are lost
... We are of yesterday and know nothing.

Erskine's point here is to preserve the certainty of God's grace in the gospel by (so to speak) banishing election into the transcendent realm of supra-rational mystery. The limitations of God's salvific activity in election cannot undermine His universal mercy in Christ, because the former is too mysterious to sustain any perceived logical relation to the latter. One may be excused, I think, for feeling that this is an unsatisfactory procedure; Erskine speaks loud and long on his somewhat unclear thought that all are pardoned, yet drops to a whisper and gives us only this one utterance about the compar-

actively lucid thought that God is sovereign in a sinner's conversion.

We must conclude that as far as election is concerned, Erskine was still a Calvinist when he wrote the Freeness, but that all the signs are there of his approaching relinquishment of Calvinism's most distinctive doctrine.

Lying at the root of Erskine's procedure throughout the Freeness is his ethical pragmatism. We have seen this element in his thought as far back as his Essay on Salvation in 1816. Its presence in the Freeness is evident, in that the governing principle behind his insistence on universal pardon is that such a doctrine alone can induce men to love and confide in God. That is: only such a doctrine is ethically efficacious; only such a doctrine will produce in men affection and trust towards their Creator. Consider the following passages:

The great cause of the disorder and misery that distract the human mind, is averseness or indifference to God. The love of God, the key-stone of the arch, is fallen from its place, and all has, in consequence, gone to wreck. The sense of sin continually increases this averseness of the heart from God, because pollution hates and fears holiness, and an accusing conscience dreads avenging justice. The only medicine which can cure this dreadful and wide spreading disorder, must be something which will replace the keystone in the arch, - something which will rekindle love towards God, which will do away fear, and inspire confidence.

Now, the manifestation of the character of God contained in the circumstances of the paragon, is exactly fitted for this purpose.³⁴

Holy love is the great principle developed in the gospel. It is the union of an

infinite abhorrence towards sin, and an infinite love towards the sinner. This mysterious history is the mighty instrument with which the Spirit of God breaks the power of sin in the heart, and establishes holy gratitude and filial dependence.³⁵

The use of faith, then, is not to remove the penalty, or to make the pardon better - for the penalty is removed and the pardon is proclaimed, whether we believe it or not - but to give the pardon a moral influence, by which it may heal the spiritual diseases of the heart; which influence it cannot have in the nature of things unless it is believed.³⁶

This sense of pardon, however, is the only thing which can lead us into the presence of God, with childlike confidence; it is the only thing which can enable us to look at the justice and holiness of God, without dislike and fear. It is the only thing that can produce holy gratitude ...³⁷

It is a question I have often heard asked, - 'do you think that the belief of such or such a doctrine, or of such or such a view of a doctrine is essential to salvation?' This question always seems to me to indicate a mistake in the mind of the asker, as to the nature of salvation. The heart which truly loves God as its good and its portion, has got salvation; for salvation is the love of the heart for God. Any belief which produces this love, is consistent with salvation; and any belief which does not and cannot produce this love, is inconsistent with salvation.³⁸

There is more on this topic, but the above citations are adequate. They show very clearly that Erskine's fundamental concern was with the production of spirituality in the human heart and that he viewed doctrines through

this ethical grid. Once more, as in the Remarks, his criterion of truth is that which edifies.

In connection with this stress on the inward state of the heart, we ought again to take note of Erskine's psychologizing tendency. He still seems unable to conceive of personal salvation except in terms of the natural operations and interplay of mind and feelings. It appears, for instance, in this discussion of Adam and Eve's response to the protevangelion:

The expression, 'they were justified by faith', when applied to them to Adam and Eve would seem to me to signify simply this, - that believing the reality of the love of God as expressed in the benevolent purpose which he had intimated to them respecting their future Deliverer, they took their forgiveness as included in it, and looked with confidence towards God. This, I believe, was their justification, if they were indeed justified, and this I believe to have been the justification of every child of God from that hour to this: for I do not feel persuaded that any man ever receives or received anything in consequence of his belief of a truth, other than the natural effect of that truth upon his mind.³⁹

Or, put more simply towards the close of the book:

Salvation is the truth of God, abiding richly and efficiently in the soul, and how can truth enter the heart, but by being believed? Salvation is thus by faith, and by faith alone, that is, it is the effect produced on the heart by the truth of God believed.⁴⁰

Erskine's desire to bring out the universality of the gospel made this approach congenial. The gospel is a spiritual mechanism adapted to the inner workings of every

human heart; if believed, it automatically sanctifies through its inherent faculty for stimulating and moulding the natural feelings. In this way Erskine is able to articulate his concern that God stands related to all men in the same way. The subjective attitude of a sinner is not able to alter God's attitude, but only to perceive it, feel it, and be purified thereby.⁴¹ Salvation means sanctification.

Another way in which Erskine emphasized the closeness and availability of God to all men was by dwelling with very considerable eloquence on the immanence of God. There are some of the most poetic passages in all Erskine's writings, and they deserve to be quoted almost in full:

There is something inexpressibly mysterious and solemn in the relation of the creature to the Creator. There is no parallel to it in the universe. When I think of it, I am overwhelmed by it. I cannot conceive how I have the consciousness of a separate existence distinct from my Creator. It seems to me that I am in regard to Him as a ray of light to the sun, proceeding continually out of His substance, and having no individuality of my own ...

The course of nature, the elements, the order of events, the existence and movement of all matter, are the direct actings of God. And are not the existence and movement of mind, too, His actings? Surely it is so, and must be so, but yet I feel that my will works contrary to His. My will is the sustained creature of His will from moment to moment, incapable of a single act without power communicated from Him, - and yet I am conscious that it works contrary to Him, and is morally responsible for so doing. This is too wonderful for me, I cannot attain unto it. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me.

With what feelings ought I to regard Him, to whose infinite mind my individual existence, with every particular of my history through the future eternity, has been from all past eternity a distinct and familiar idea. It was a birth of His mind from all eternity. At length He realised it, by calling me into life and giving me a substantial existence, - and He has ever since sustained this life, by His continual pervading presence on every part of my soul and body. I have never been a single moment separated from Him. It is impossible that I should be separated from Him without ceasing to exist. I have never been alone, - and I know that through eternity I never shall be alone ...

What an unspeakable relation is this!
 And what an infinite possibility of enjoyment rises out of this perpetually pervading presence, seeing it is a presence of infinite holiness, and love, and beauty, and wisdom! But it seems as if He were too near me to see Him, as the eye sees not itself. Yet I feel assured that until I see Him and feel Him in His perpetually pervading presence of infinite holiness, and love, and beauty, and wisdom, I cannot have that good for which I was created. This presence is my real home and my real portion, and until I become sensible of it, I am without a home and without a portion in the universe.⁴²

Erskine was accused of pantheism by Andrew Thomson on the basis of these passages, but it does not seem a just criticism. Any poetic description of the divine immanence is almost inevitably open to pantheistic misconstruction.⁴³

Erskine soars to still sublimer heights of sacred eloquence when he relates God's immanence to redemption:

When man discovers that his Creator, the fountain of eternity, the fountain of his being and of all being, in whom and by whom he lives and thinks and feels - who pervades and sustains his soul and his body in all their parts - who ever is and ever must be

essentially present in every faculty and capacity of his nature, without whom nothing lives, nothing happens, nothing is done through all worlds- in whom, as in their one root, all the varieties of things are united, and from whom, as from their one root, they all grow - when he discovers that this great one, this mystery which contains and binds in and animates the universe, has a love for him which passes thought as well as utterance; a love that led Him to take on Himself the human nature, that He might suffer and groan and die for him, - when he discovers that He did this that he might live for ever in the knowledge and fellowship of His holy love, dwelt in by Him and animated by His Spirit, and filled with His fulness, with His light and love and joy - Oh! then the darkness is past and the true light is come. He hath found the pearl of eternity, the pearl of great price, - he knows the meaning of that word, 'he that hath the Son hath life;' he hath found the pearl, and for joy thereof he goeth and selleth all that he hath and buyeth it.⁴⁴

Erskine's vivid awareness of God as a living Being saved his profound albeit pragmatic emphasis on believing the right doctrines from degenerating into a dry, hairsplitting scholasticism. Indeed, his spiritual pragmatism is nowhere more evident than in precisely this area. He makes it clear that his interest in true doctrine is a merely instrumental interest. The doctrines exist, not for their mere truth, but in order to bring men to the God of whom they testify:

... it is, perhaps, one of the chief snares and deceptions of our day to mistake the knowledge of religion for religion itself, and to receive the doctrines of Christianity without receiving the God revealed in the doctrines. We may pride ourselves on our knowledge of religion as upon any other knowledge, and thus we may be strengthening the spirit of independence, and so barring the door of our hearts more securely against God, whilst we are fondly flattering ourselves, that we are opening to receive Him.⁴⁵

It is the God who is revealed and contained in the doctrines that alarms and assails the independence of the natural man. When they are separated from Him and His omnipotence, they can take their place under the dark shadow of the atheism of the heart as well as the syllogisms or emblazonments of any other science. How different are these forms from the overawing reality with which the doctrines are animated in the Bible. And Oh, how different is the effect produced by them on the hearts of their partizans, - from those cries and breathings of the creature after the Creator, which are embalmed in the sacred record, and which still seem to ascend to heaven like incense from an altar.⁴⁶

By their very nature, the doctrines of the Bible point beyond themselves to God; therefore one is not believing them for what they really are, unless one is led by them to that apprehension of the living God which Erskine felt to be the lifeblood of true religion.

There is ^{ch} must more that could be said about the Freeness, since it is such a many-sided and provocative piece of writing. But we must restrict ourselves to two final comments, by way of summing up this most controversial of Erskine's books.

Firstly, that confusion of the natural and the supernatural which we have constantly noted as a feature of Erskine's religious thought, is more pronounced than ever in the Freeness. The distinction between the realms outside of Christ and in Christ has been radically undermined by his vigorous assertion that all men are pardoned, that justification means only a sense of pardon, that God is related to all men in the same way, that the gospel operates through natural feelings. Even his lyrical exposition of divine immanence can be seen as part of

the same pattern. Most of these elements have indeed appeared in Erskine's previous writings; the uniqueness of the Freeness is the way in which they all appear together in such a sustained and deliberate fashion. Of the two struggling theologies we have postulated in Erskine's mind, the old Calvinistic Evangelicalism is more muted than ever before, and the new Universalist immanentism more explicit and pervasive.

Secondly, and perhaps strangely, the Freeness is, in the opinion both of the present writer and Erskine's contemporary critics, the most charming of his writings. The tone of its piety is infectious. A possible explanation may be that Erskine unconsciously realised how far he was straying in the Freeness from the standards of Calvinistic orthodoxy, and tried to compensate with a display of pious sentiment, as if to reassure himself and his readers that his heart was still in the right place. But whatever his motives, the fact remains that the Freeness, in spite of its glaring inconsistencies and sometimes quite bizarre exegesis, is coloured by a rich, deep, transparently sincere piety not to be found in any of Erskine's other writings, and certainly not in the subsequent productions of his pen.

(ii) Reactions to the "Freeness": the periodicals

The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel was the most controversial of all Erskine's publications, as well as being in effect the first main ingredient in the whole of the Row controversy. It is therefore expedient for us to pause to analyse the response to the Freeness on the part of the organs of public religious opinion. We will do this in two stages. Firstly, we will examine

the reactions of the religious periodicals by looking at reviews of the Freeness published by six of them in the period 1828 - 29. Secondly, we will investigate the reactions of individual persons who either went into print with books or pamphlets written against the Freeness, or who, being significant individuals in their own right, expressed an opinion as to its merits.

Firstly, then, we turn to the periodicals. We have selected six such periodicals: the Edinburgh Christian Instructor, the Evangelical Magazine, the Eclectic Review, the British Critic, the Christian Guardian and the Christian Observer. These are all major periodicals of the time and together they give a fairly representative picture of the state of religious opinion. We will deal with their respective reviews of the Freeness in chronological order of publication.

(a) The Edinburgh Christian Instructor

The Edinburgh Christian Instructor, edited by Dr. Andrew Thomson of St. George's, Edinburgh, was the first periodical to review the Freeness, in June 1828. As might be expected from this bastion of Scottish Calvinism, the review was highly critical of Erskine's theology, although not unfriendly to his person. The review commences by classing Erskine among

speculating commentators on the doctrines of grace, each of whom sends forth his oracle with apparent confidence, that his views are more correct and scriptural than those commonly entertained...¹

However, before launching into his criticisms, the reviewer confesses that

we have seldom read a book which gave us more delightful impressions of the author's

piety, and devoted attachment to the cause of pure and undefiled Christianity.²

Here is the essential paradox, repeated through almost all the public responses to the Freeness: its theology is defective, but its spirituality is delightful.

The reviewer's initial criticism relates to the way in which Erskine redefines traditional theological terms in the Freeness, such as "pardon" and "salvation".

A departure from the common phraseology on the subject of the gospel, on the alleged ground of its being liable to misinterpretation, we cannot help regarding with suspicion, and we are somewhat disposed to ascribe it to the author's not finding it suited to the system of doctrine which he has espoused.³

His first example is Erskine's definition of heaven and hell. True to his subjectivist psychologizing tendencies, Erskine in the Freeness had defined heaven as "the name for a character conformed to the will of God", and hell as "the name for a character opposed to the will of God", rather than as places of reward and punishment.⁴ The reviewer dismissed this as patently unbiblical, quoting Christ's words in MATT. 5:12, "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great", and 23:33, "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the sentence of hell?" Erskine's subjective definitions are at best only "metaphorical language".⁵

Next he deals with the far more important topic of pardon. Quoting half-a-dozen instances of Erskine's attempts to describe the meaning of pardon, he objects to Erskine's construction of it as universal, on two grounds. First,

a universal extension of Christ's atoning work in securing pardon is "high Arminian doctrine" and thus heretical from a Presbyterian point of view; second, a universal amnesty necessarily implies universal salvation, unless there are conditions governing its application - in which case we cannot speak of "unconditional" pardon.⁶

Erskine's definition of salvation as sanctification then falls under the reviewer's critical eye. He objects to Erskine's removal of pardon from the definition of salvation:

We hesitate not to say, that there is much fancy and no soundness in this distinction, attempted to be made, between pardon and salvation.⁷

Personal salvation means pardon as well as sanctification. He proves this from ACTS 5:31 - "He Jesus is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Saviour, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." If Christ is a Saviour who grants forgiveness, forgiveness must be part of salvation, and not a universal benefit distinct from salvation. In the same connection he also quoted TIT. 2:14 - "who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." His comment:

Whom He redeems by His blood He as certainly purifies by His Spirit; so that redemption and salvation are not separate, as our Author's theory will have them.⁸

Finally he attacks Erskine's hyper-Calvinistic definition of justification as a sense of pardon. This definition, if valid (he argues), would have to be applied to related

doctrinal terms. Hence sanctification would mean "a sense of being renewed in the whole man after the image of God", and adoption "a sense of being received into the number, and having a right to all the privileges of the sons of God."⁹ But this is absurd; so, therefore, is Erskine's definition of justification.

The doctrine of assurance was almost bound to enter into the debate provoked by Erskine's Freeness, especially in the Scottish context, where theologians were particularly sensitive to the doctrine. We have already noted the ongoing debate over this matter in relation to the views of the French revivalists, which takes up considerable space in the 1828 volume of the Instructor. The reviewer of the Freeness, representing the mainstream Scottish view, did not accept that assurance of salvation was of the essence of faith, and he accordingly criticises Erskine for apparently teaching the opposite. Erskine maintained in the Freeness, as we saw, that for a man to believe the gospel necessarily means believing that God loves him, Christ died for him, and he is forgiven his sins. The reviewer takes Erskine to task for this:

We reject the sentiment as warranted neither by Scripture doctrine, nor Scripture history.¹⁰

He contends that it is possible for a man to be a Christian while lacking assurance of God's love, Christ's death for himself, and his own forgiveness.

We cannot ... approve of those who would unceremoniously deprive [such a man] of his spiritual character as a Christian, because he feels not that assurance of salvation which they profess to enjoy.¹¹

But the phrase "assurance of salvation", employed by the

reviewer, reminds us that we must be on our guard against confusion at this point. Erskine's peculiar definitions of pardon and salvation rendered the assurance debate even more problematic than it already was. Erskine was not contending for a Christian's assurance that he really is a Christian, or the assurance of glory hereafter; these to him were "salvation", viz. matters of inner spirituality, and thus not matters of direct assurance. Assurance of "salvation" Erskine did not believe in, according to his own idiosyncratic definition of the term. But he did hold it to be objectively true that God loved all men, Christ died for all men, and all men were "pardoned" (i.e., not barred from God's presence). Hence assurance of these truths, directly revealed in the Bible, was fundamental to a belief in the gospel, since they were component truths of the gospel.

The Christian Instructor reviewer does not seem to grasp this distinction, since he assumes that assurance of God's love and assurance of salvation (i.e., of deliverance from sin's penalty and power) are identical.¹² But they are identical only on high Calvinist premises, in which God's love is practically coextensive with election, so that to be assured of God's love and of personal deliverance from sin's penalty and power are essentially equivalent. It is therefore not entirely just for the reviewer to criticize Erskine for teaching that assurance of salvation is of the essence of faith, although it is obvious how such criticisms could arise.

The reviewer is on far clearer ground when he concentrates on Erskine's belief that Christ died for all men. Erskine certainly held that believing this, and therefore being assured that Christ died for oneself, was of the essence of faith. The reviewer opposes this by the standard arguments of high Calvinism, to the effect that

"world" and "all men", in Biblical usage, do not necessarily denote the human race distributively. He cites MK. 16:15, JN. 12:19 and JN. 18:20 to prove that "world" can mean something less than what Erskine and other deviants from high Calvinism wished it to mean, and MATT. 3:5 to prove that "all men" can mean something less than "all men without exception". The reviewer maintains that such universal terms are often used in scripture simply to denote all types of men, or all men of a given class or locality. Since Erskine thinks, however, that Christ died as substitute for all men absolutely, the reviewer almost inevitably brands him an Arminian, for the second time in the review.¹³

The reviewer next argues that Erskine's scheme is inconsistent with God's sovereignty. How can God purpose that His Son should purchase redemption for all men, and yet elect only some to be saved? God's decrees are logical, definite and infallible; Erskine makes them discordant and dubious by his postulation of universal love/atonement and limited salvation.¹⁴

Finally, the reviewer chastises Erskine for his inaccurate exegesis of certain words and phrases, e.g. the Greek terms *πλεοναζω* and *περισσευω* from ROMANS 6 (meaning "to abound"), which Erskine had distinguished as referring respectively to numerical plurality and extension of a single thing, but which the reviewer argues are synonymous. The reviewer has Arndt and Gingrich on his side; they interpret *πλεοναζω* as "be or become more, be or become great, be present in abundance, grow, increase", and *περισσευω* as "be more than enough, be left over, be present in abundance, be extremely rich or abundant, overflow, grow". Adolphe Monod's comment on Erskine's private exposition of ROMANS in Naples the previous year comes to mind:

He explains it well, with the exception of a few passages which he construes or interprets in a way which does not seem to me in accordance with the spirit of the Greek language.¹⁵

The reviewer concludes on a more positive note:

Before we conclude, we must acknowledge that, though we differ from Mr. Erskine in many of his positions, we like exceedingly the manner in which he has conducted his Treatise. There are an ease and an elegance and a felicity in the diction, and a glowing spirit of Christian piety and benevolence in the sentiments, which cannot but make the happiest impression on the mind of every Christian reader, however differently he may view some of the points discussed. We do not retract anything of what we have said, but we shall be sorry if we have expressed ourselves, in any way, not accordant with unfeigned respect for him, as a gentleman and a Christian.¹⁶

This review, then, was the response of Scottish Calvinistic orthodoxy to the Freeness. It was a book full of errors, particularly on the topics of pardon, assurance and the extent of the atonement, but also a book that charmed by its graceful style and enchanted by its pious sentiments. In other words, it was Thomas Erskine at the crossroads, with moderate Calvinism behind him and Universalism before him.

(b) The Evangelical Magazine

In November 1828, the Evangelical Magazine published a review of the Freeness. This English periodical was Calvinistic in outlook and reacted to Erskine's book in much the same way as the Edinburgh Christian Instructor.

The review begins by lamenting the theological decline and fall of Thomas Erskine:

Mr. Erskine was, perhaps, the last man from whom we should have expected such a volume as the one before us. From his genius, indeed, we might have looked for something novel and strange; but from his accurate and penetrating understanding, we anticipated every necessary corrective. But, alas! What are the best of men, when permitted to lean to their own understanding?¹⁷

Erskine's previous writings, especially the Remarks, had earned him the reputation of being a good Evangelical author, as we have already seen. The above comment of the Evangelical Magazine reviewer bears this out, and also starts the new trend of bewailing Erskine's derailment from the sound doctrine he once believed. The previously solid Erskine is now "the victim of specious and delusive errors".¹⁸

The reviewer attacks Erskine's subjective definitions of heaven and hell as inner states. More to the point, he contends that Erskine's scheme of universal pardon is in reality just as perplexed by conditionality as the orthodox doctrine of justification by faith.

It may be very true, that his notion of pardon is perfectly free, - that is, requiring neither repentance nor faith as pre-requisites; as pardon, however, according to his view, is not salvation, but the means by which it is produced, we ask Mr. E., whether everything most vital to men as sinners is not as much as ever clogged with that very condition of faith from which he seeks to escape? We venture to reply on his behalf, and tell him, that, according to his new-fangled theory, it has as much that is conditional belonging to it as has the orthodox notion of a sinner's pardon through faith in the blood of the Lamb; for our readers will observe, that, even according to Mr. E., a man cannot become holy - cannot have the disease of the soul

healed - cannot be conformed to the character of God - cannot enjoy heaven - until, by faith, he believes in that pardon which is passed upon all, but which none truly feel, save those who have set their seal that God is true in the record which He has given concerning His Son.¹⁹

This is fair criticism. Erskine had not wholly removed conditionality from the gospel, for just so long as he admitted that only those who believed would in fact be saved. A man must have faith if he is to avoid hell:

in this "if" we see the condition. Erskine's final solution to this was of course full-blown Universalism. Nor had Erskine succeeded in removing conditionality even from the area of God's will to men, owing to his continuing adherence to the Calvinistic doctrine of election. A man can know himself to be embraced in God's salvific will only if he has faith, in which case an element of contingency remains even in this area. However, we must recognise that Erskine had gone some way towards removing conditionality from the gospel by his declaration that God unconditionally repeals the sentence of exclusion from His presence which had been passed on sinful men at the Fall. Whether the concept of an entirely unconditional gospel is a Biblical concept is another question, as the reviewer perceives:

It is but a bugbear ... to talk of it [faith] as a condition. Why be thus startled by names? If by a condition be meant something that entitles the sinner to the richness of blessings treasured up in Christ, or anything that combined with His merits constitutes our salvation, then the notion is equally absurd and unscriptural; but if, by a condition, be meant something that must necessarily, in the order of divine appointment, precede our interest in the Redeemer - something that brings the mind into contact with the realities of divine truth - something that unites the soul to

Christ, so as to derive life from Him, the living Vine, - who can object to such a condition? ²⁰

Here we see a frontal assault on Erskine's whole position. The gospel is conditional!

The reviewer also objects to Erskine's account of the state of mankind outside of Christ. They are not merely unsanctified though forgiven; they are unforgiven - under God's wrath, JN. 3:36 - children of wrath, EPH. 2:3 - under God's curse, GAL. 3:10.

Can this be the case with individuals pardoned? It surely cannot be, unless, with his new theology, Mr. Erskine has got a new mode of determining the import of language - the meaning of plain English terms. ²¹

Erskine's terminology again falls under the lash. Furthermore, the reviewer argues, the believer is said to be "delivered from the wrath to come", I THESS. 1:10 - passes out of judgment, JN. 5:24, into a state of no condemnation, ROM. 8:1 - and his iniquities are forgiven and his sins covered, ROM. 5:5-8. Therefore by faith a man does not gain merely a sense of pardon, but actual pardon.

The reviewer concludes in the same vein as the Edinburgh Christian Instructor:

After having thus freely dealt with our much respected and ingenious author, we feel it but justice to remark, that there are, in most parts of the volume before us, passages of surpassing interest and beauty. Whenever Mr. E. speaks of the message of reconciliation, as the healing balm of the soul,

he does equal honour to his penetration and to his Christian feelings. The purifying influence of the truth he well understands. How happy should we be to see a work so enchanting purged from those heresies which disfigure it! We hope Mr. E. will give us credit for the existence of every feeling of Christian love towards him. Though we would contend earnestly for the faith, we do not forget former obligations, nor would we despair of future amendment. But we tell Mr. E., that his new theory is too feeble for even his genius to hallow it, and give it currency, in the churches of Christ.²²

The Evangelical Magazine's response is thus essentially the same as that of the Edinburgh Christian Instructor. The Freeness is a pious book, but vitiated by heterodoxy. Its doctrine that all are pardoned and that salvation means sanctification is unscriptural; its phraseology is arbitrary and deceptive; its avowed aim of delineating the Evangelical gospel more clearly as a gospel of free grace, is a total failure. Thus the Evangelical Magazine. We turn next to the Eclectic Review.

(c) The Eclectic Review

The December 1828 edition of the Eclectic Review, a magazine which represented a very liberal Evangelical outlook, carried a joint review of the Freeness and a commentary on ROMANS by C.H. Terrot. It classed these two together because they both concentrated on the doctrine of justification by faith, but we may ignore Terrot for our purposes.

This review was much more favourable to Erskine than the Edinburgh Christian Instructor and Evangelical Magazine had been, in the sense that the reviewer was evidently more impressed by the piety of the Freeness than distressed by its theology. He gives several excerpts from the

Freeness, passages in which the spiritual eloquence of Erskine is at its best. However, he does make several criticisms of Erskine's Greek scholarship, e.g. Erskine's rendering of $\pi \lambda ε ο ν α ρ \omega$, and then expressed the following sentiment:

Mr. Erskine, as we have seen, does not shine as a Biblical critic; nor is he a theologian; - and we like him none the worse for this: he brings to the study of the scriptures an untrammelled, unsophisticated, independent mind. He writes like a man who has thought for himself, thought and felt intensely; and his views of religion are so high and holy, so pure, and just, and delightful, that, to use his own language, instead of presuming to teach such a man, we would rather desire to learn from him. We have derived from the repeated perusal of his volume, the highest pleasure, and we hope edification.²³

However, the reviewer feels obliged to point out to his readers that Erskine has "laid himself open to misapprehension, and even just reproof" on account of his language about the universality of pardon, the antecedence of pardon to faith, and justification as a sense of pardon.²⁴

"Mr Erskine errs in his definition of justification", the reviewer asserts.²⁵ He then makes the point made by the Edinburgh Christian Instructor and Evangelical Magazine, that the unbeliever is according to Scripture not pardoned at all until he believes; or, reversing Paul's statement in ROM. 8:1 "There is condemnation to them who are not in Christ Jesus".²⁶

We need not labour the point. The criticisms are of the same sort as in the previous two reviews. All we can say before passing on to the next review is that there is something strangely ironic in the spectacle of Erskine's having written the Freeness to prove that all are uncon-

ditionally pardoned, only to be told by the most positive of his reviewers that although "fervent piety glows in every page" of his book²⁷, yet he is not a theologian and his idea of unconditional pardon is "unguarded and even erroneous"!

(d) The British Critic

The British Critic - or, to give it its full title, the British Critic, Quarterly Theological Review and Ecclesiastical Record - printed a review of the Freeness in January 1829. It was the most negative of the six reviews of the Freeness at which we are looking; this is probably accounted for by the fact that the British Critic's religious point of view was high Anglicanism, so that the reviewer was not likely to be impressed even by Erskine's Calvinist piety.

The reviewer opens with a lengthy assault on the perils of scholastic speculation in religion, evidently considering Erskine an instance of this.²⁹ He says a little later in this regard, referring to Erskine's account of the Fall and of Adam and Eve's feelings about it and the protevangelion:

All this might, perhaps, be endured, if Mr. E. were only collecting poetical materials for a second paradise lost : but we deprecate this practice of spinning theology out of moonshine; of fortifying our faith with air-built-castles, and feeding our hopes and desires, with 'such stuff as dreams are made of'.³⁰

There follows a terse statement of the positions espoused by Erskine in the Freeness regarding universal pardon, the atonement, and sanctification by faith. The reviewer then defends "protestant orthodoxy"³¹ against Erskine's

charge that it obscured the freeness of grace by its scheme of salvation conditional on faith, delivering the same sort of broadside against Erskine as the Evangelical Magazine had done by plainly asserting that the gospel is conditional. He quotes the Baptist Robert Hall on this point:

When the terms conditions of salvation, or words of similar import, are employed, he wishes it once for all to be clearly understood that he utterly disclaims the notion of meritorious conditions, and that he intends by that term only what is necessary in the established order of means, a sine qua non, that without which another thing cannot take place. When thus defined, to deny there are conditions of salvation, is not to approach antinomianism merely, it is to fall into the gulph.³²

The reviewer reiterates another point made by the Evangelical Magazine, viz. that Erskine's scheme is in reality just as conditional as the orthodox scheme, because a man derives no ultimate benefit from the universal pardon, according to Erskine, unless he believes it.

So that, after all, the difference between a follower of the received theology, and a disciple of Mr. E., amounts to this; - that the one receives his own individual pardon, on applying for it at the throne of mercy, and that the other becomes a partaker in the privileges of the gospel, when once he believes that a comprehensive act of grace has been proclaimed to the whole world, in which act he must, of course, be himself included. Where then, we ask, is the superior advantage or facility enjoyed by him who embraces this latter explanation?³³

He then argues that in respect of assurance, Erskine has totally failed to meet the real problem of the man who doubts the authenticity of his own faith. Erskine can

assure him that God loves and forgives him, but he cannot assure him that he has sincerely embraced these truths into his own mind.

... it seems that there is a class of persons who are liable to sore and agonising perplexity, occasioned by doubts whether they are real and true believers; - whether their faith is of the genuine and effective character; - whether the link is firm which unites them to the unutterable blessings of the gospel ... These are fears and perplexities, it is true, with which, under any scheme or modification of Christianity, the soul may be assailed, at any period of its progress; for uniform peace and joy in believing, are privileges hardly granted to the ripest and most experienced saint: but we are quite unable to discern in the system of Mr. E. any peculiar virtue, which shall exclude such terrors, or dislodge them, when once they have found entrance into the soul.³⁴

Erskine's entire scheme, charges the reviewer, is destructive of God's moral government of the universe, and "seems to pluck out the heart of penitential devotion". As far as I am aware, the British Critic has the honour of being the first to insinuate publicly that Erskine was essentially on the way to Universalism:

we are much afraid that the speculations of this writer are chargeable with a tendency, if not wholly to obliterate, at least greatly to weaken and dilute, the doctrine of Judgment and Retribution: and it is needless to say, that there must be something perniciously defective in any theory, or any statement which has this tendency ... The certainty of retribution is like a burning light, of intensity and power sufficient to shine through the substance of the darkest sayings of revelation. Now whatever may be the purpose of this author, we do not see how his statements can be altogether cleared from the imputation of spreading a partial eclipse over this great principle ...³⁵

He goes on, inevitably, to criticize Erskine's psychological definitions of heaven and hell.³⁶

We may also note that the British Critic reviewer joins in the lambasting of Erskine's Greek exegesis in relation to ROMANS 6, again singling out Erskine's attempts to distinguish πλεοναζω from περισσευω . He asserts that a serious consideration of Erskine's endeavours in this area will "reduce his pretensions as a scholar and a critic to the same level with his pretensions as a logician."³⁷

Almost the sole positive note in this twenty-five page review occurs in the following remark:

There is so much in the present volume, (as well as in the two former treatises of the author,) which indicates a heart devoted to the cause of the Gospel, and a mind capable of honouring that cause, that we have no delight in dwelling on its faults. The work, however, we understand, is immensely popular. It has already gone through two editions; and it is probably, at this moment, among the manuals of a large circle of religious inquirers. We have, therefore, felt it our duty to sprinkle a few cold, and, we fear, unwelcome, drops of caution, upon the temperaments which it may have unduly heightened; and to lower, in some degree, the pulses which it may have quickened to a more than 'healthful music'.³⁸

We will glance later at the popular impact of the Freeness. For the present, however, we must pass on to the next review, which occurs in the pages of the Christian Guardian.

(e) The Christian Guardian

At the same time as the British Critic, the Christian Guardian published a review of the Freeness in its January

1829 edition. Like the British Critic, the Christian Guardian was an Anglican periodical, but Evangelical in its outlook.

The reviewer opens with a lamentation:

Several years have elapsed since we were called on to notice Mr. Erskine's former publication (Christian Guardian, March, 1823) but the remembrance of the pleasure we then experienced was so vivid, that we took up the present volume in full expectation of finding similar satisfaction. We must however acknowledge that we have been greatly disappointed.³⁹

The theme of the decline and fall of Thomas Erskine meets us again. The reviewer accuses Erskine of "thirst for novelty and improvement":

There is nothing more fascinating to the mind of 'vain man', who 'would be wise',⁴⁰ than the idea of making discoveries ...

Erskine, once so sound, has been ensnared in this fatal trap.

He believes that eighteen centuries have passed away, and that during this long period no theologian has succeeded in stating the doctrine of justification by faith as it ought to be exhibited; and that it has been reserved for him to give such a representation of this fundamental point as shall free it from all difficulties, and obviate all objections.⁴¹

We should notice this aspect of the pattern of orthodox response to Erskine's new ideas, exemplified in the above quotation and present also in the reviews published by

the Edinburgh Christian Instructor, Evangelical Magazine and British Critic, namely, the attack on Erskine's mental balance. Andrew Thomson was to take this to great lengths, as we shall see. Erskine (so the response runs) is intellectually deficient, unstable, presumptuous, a dangerous and unhealthy religious speculator in his advocacy of his peculiar doctrines. One is once more reminded of Adolphe Monod's judgment:

He judges by feeling, and proves by imagination; consequently his book is a series of comparisons which do not always agree well one with another, besides which comparisons are not reasons.⁴²

It is as well to bear in mind that Erskine's theological opinions were not the only thing about him that his contemporaries criticized.

The Christian Guardian reviewer makes yet again the point that the gospel is in fact conditional. He quotes Erskine as saying that if we tell a man that salvation is gratuitous, but that he must believe in order to be saved, then "we appear to him to be saying, free and unfree with the same breath."⁴³

And, we may add [says the reviewer] ,
would not the Bible appear to him to do the
same?⁴⁴

The language of the Bible is just as "objectionable" as that of orthodoxy in its conditionalness.⁴⁵

The reviewer himself finds objectionable Erskine's peculiar vocabulary in respect of heaven and hell, pardon and justification - a common criticism, as we have seen. He also objects to Erskine's lack of Scriptural documentation

for his distinctive positions.

In reading his work, we were struck with the very feeble attempt he has made to support his theory by scripture references; and we cannot but think he has wisely avoided the most difficult part of his work.⁴⁶

The Freeness actually contains many Scripture references, but none of them can be said to prove the specific points Erskine wishes to establish concerning universal pardon and justification as a sense of pardon. The reviewer also criticises Erskine's attempts at Greek scholarship, such as his interpretation of ROMANS 6, which everyone seems to have found exegetically incompetent. His final criticism, however, is reserved for the doctrine of assurance. He charges Erskine's system with having a tendency to soothe men to sleep in their sins:

This is the bane of every theological scheme which makes the assurance of our personal interest in the blessings of the gospel, a part of justifying faith...⁴⁷

Presumably he means one's interest in the atonement and the pardon it seals, assurance of which Erskine certainly taught was essential to faith.

The reviewer in his last paragraph includes the customary acknowledgement of the pious qualities of the Freeness:

We are firmly persuaded that Mr. Erskine's aim is good, and we readily admit that there are many passages which the pious reader will peruse with profit and advantage.⁴⁸

The response of the Christian Guardian, then, is typical, and we may move on without further ado to our final example

of a periodical review of the Freeness, found in the Christian Observer.

(f) The Christian Observer

The February 1829 edition of the Christian Observer contained our sixth and final review of the Freeness. It was perhaps the most even-tempered of the reviews from the standpoint of Evangelical orthodoxy. (The Observer was another Anglican periodical).

The reviewer sums up his verdict on the Freeness in his second paragraph, before moving on to details:

There is so soothing and heavenly-minded a strain of piety running through Mr. Erskine's pages, such an evident solicitude to promote the glory of God and the best interests of mankind, that it is with reluctance we are compelled to express our opinion that he has entirely failed in his argument. In the first place, we think he has mistaken the cause of the difficulties he mentions [re justification by faith] : in the next, his reply does not remove them: and in the third, his whole system would entirely want support but for the most violent interpretations of Scripture, and a nomenclature as peculiar, and even inconsistent with itself, as it is novel.⁴⁹

Erskine's deep piety; his objectionable exegesis; his innovatory terminology: here we have the major points once again. As to the details of the reviewer's criticisms, the following are worthy of note.

The reviewer thinks that one of Erskine's central faults is his failure to convict the unbeliever of sin. Erskine addresses himself "to the understanding, instead of to the conscience", and tries "to convince 'the natural man' by argument, instead of first seeking to lead him, under

the influence of the Holy Spirit, to that knowledge of himself which is the only preparation for the right reception of the doctrines of grace."⁵⁰ Or, in the terms adopted by this thesis, Erskine blurs the line between natural and supernatural, unregenerate and regenerate, the spheres outside and inside of Christ. Erskine is indeed right, the reviewer says, that the knowledge of God's grace will bind the penitent heart to God; "but to the great mass of mankind, we fear the doctrine here stated, would operate as a direct encouragement 'to continue in sin'."⁵¹ For if a man has not been brought to an awareness of his need of God's grace in Christ, the bare proclamation of it as already embracing him will merely deaden his conscience to the seriousness of sin and the requirement of repentance. He will conclude in false security that all is well.

However, the reviewer continues, Erskine's message of universal pardon (about which he says, "we do not think it scriptural") is practically vitiated by the fact that he gives no clear or consistent idea as to what pardon is.

... the term 'pardon', as used by Mr. Erskine ... is something very different from what divines in general understand by that term; so different indeed, that after carefully perusing all he has written on the subject, we do not know exactly what it is, or how it is applicable to the solution of the difficulty which he alleges.⁵²

He then details some of the inconsistent definitions and statements regarding pardon which Erskine makes in the Freeness⁵³, and which we have documented in our analysis of the book. His conclusion:

We would not speak harshly; but surely such inconsistencies betray, at least, great carelessness, if not the want of understanding,

in what is affirmed.⁵⁴

He also protests against Erskine's terminology in regard to heaven, hell, pardon and justification, making the following plea:

We trust that a writer, who has such large claims upon the esteem of his fellow-Christians as Mr. Erskine, will in future refrain from this dangerous alchemy.⁵⁵

A further objection the reviewer levels against the Free-ness is its attempt to deny self-love any place in true spirituality. One can see how Erskine's high ethical concern and his desire to throw all attention on God and His love might lead him to make this attempt. The reviewer argues against Erskine that this position would undermine gratitude to God for His gifts, and cancel the command to love one's neighbour as oneself. Erskine was to run into endless trouble with his opponents in this area, as might be expected, since he was accusing them of having a religion based on selfishness. They retorted that there was a difference between sinful selfishness and legitimate self-love. The present writer feels that Erskine created an unnecessary problem by setting up self-love and love for God as alternatives, whereas they are surely quite compatible if only the latter is given ultimate priority over the former. After all, a man's love for his wife can become a barrier to his loving God, quite as easily as his self-love can do so; does that exclude conjugal love from true spirituality?

We need not dwell further on the Christian Observer's review since it is in basic accord with the other reviews.

We will, however, quote from its conclusion, since it exemplifies the large measure of ambivalence in the response of the periodicals to the Freeness:

We have made the preceding remarks not in 'the spirit of controversy', but from a fear lest the merited celebrity of our author's name, and the wide estimation on which, owing to his former essays, he is held, should give such authority to his statements as might mislead some; or (and still more) lest, on the other hand, the confusion which we think he has introduced into the subject, should increase and confirm in others their needless prejudices against the fundamental and all-important doctrine of justification, through the merits of Christ, by faith.⁵⁶

Summary

The response of the religious periodicals to the theology of the Freeness was uniformly negative. Only one of these periodicals was written from the point of view of Scottish Calvinism; Erskine was equally offensive to English Evangelicalism, within and without the Church of England, and to the high Anglicans. This is a significant fact. If in the succeeding pages of this thesis we see Erskine locked in combat with the spokesmen of orthodox Scottish Calvinism, we must not be misled into thinking that he would necessarily have fared much better at the hands of the English Evangelicals, had he lived south of the border. The exceedingly critical review of his Essay on Faith, written by an Arminian in the Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine, was published in 1828. That is to say: it was a historical accident that Scottish Calvinists were Erskine's active foes in the Row controversy. This fact certainly gave a keener edge to the dispute, since those loyal to the theology of the Westminster Confession were offended by the Arminian elements, as distinct from

the simply non-Evangelical elements, in Erskine's writings, which meant that they had considerably more about which to be offended. But Erskine's theology of universal pardon would not have been kindlier received, and was not in fact kindlier received, by the less Calvinistic Evangelicals of England, with the exception of the Eclectic Review, which was much less critical but still critical of what Erskine had to say.

By contrast, the periodicals' reaction to the piety of the Freeness was uniformly positive, although only grudgingly so in the case of the British Critic. This was a paradox rooted in Erskine himself, and can best be appreciated by actually reading the Freeness, which in places is sheer poetry.

For our present purposes, however, it is time to move on to examine the response to the Freeness on the part of individual contemporaries, in order to complete our analysis of Erskine's most controversial book and to set the scene for the tragic events of 1828 - 31.

(iii) Reactions to the "Freeness": Buchanan, Nettleton, Wardlaw and Chalmers

In this section we will examine the response to the Freeness on the part of four significant Evangelical and Calvinistic Christians: James Buchanan, Asahel Nettleton, Ralph Wardlaw and Thomas Chalmers. We will deal with them in the chronological order of the appearance of their response, and concentrate on the theological thrust of that response in order to elucidate the position Erskine put himself in vis-a-vis Calvinistic orthodoxy by means of his new doctrinal platform.

(a) James Buchanan

In James Buchanan (1804 - 70) Erskine met an opponent worthy of his mettle, one who criticised the Freeness at many points from the perspective of Calvinistic orthodoxy, yet did so in a gentle and respectful manner.

Buchanan was the youthful minister of North Leith parish church and an eloquent Evangelical preacher, who was later to secure himself a permanent place in the world of Reformed theology through his doctrinal writings (such as The Office and Work of the Holy Spirit, Analogy Considered as a Guide to Truth, and The Doctrine of Justification). Seceding from the Kirk in the Disruption, he taught from 1845 - 47 as Professor of Apologetics, and from 1847 - 68 as Professor of Systematic Theology, at New College, Edinburgh.

Buchanan's first venture into print was occasioned by Erskine's Freeness. His Letter to Thomas Erskine, Esq. Advocate, Containing Remarks on his late Work, Entitled 'The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel' appeared in 1828 - possibly the first public response to the Freeness, if it antedated the Edinburgh Christian Instructor's review of June. The Letter opens by suggesting to Erskine that he has "unintentionally impaired the symmetry of Divine Truth" by "giving undue extension to certain principles".¹ By placing too heavy an emphasis on the unconditional motif, Erskine has unwittingly made "extremes meet" and rendered the Gospel thoroughly conditional in an Arminian sense: "you reason on the very same principles with certain Arminians ... in opposition to the standards of our Church."² For Erskine says that Christ died equally for all; all are equally pardoned. Yet not all have faith. Why not? Did Christ not die to secure the grace of faith for sinners? If not, faith

must be something which does not flow from His saving work; it must be a condition fulfilled by man's own free-will, which is Arminian error. In opposition to this, Buchanan argues that Christ by His death procured faith for His elect, and quotes John Owen and John Brown of Wamphray to prove this.

Our view is, that faith is a part, and cannot, therefore, be a procuring cause, or condition of salvation: and that with all other spiritual blessings it is indeed included in the purchase of Christ.³

Buchanan proceeds to level the "double payment" argument against Erskine's view of the atonement: if Christ paid the penalty for the sins of all, it would be unjust for God to demand payment from any sinner for his own sins, since that would mean paying twice for the same offence.⁴ Erskine was to deal with this criticism in his next treatise by contending that sinners will not indeed be punished for any of those sins for which Christ died, but for the new sin of rejecting Christ's death. Buchanan anticipates this move, however, and argues that such a position destroys the universality of Christ's death for sin, i.e. "it implies that He did not satisfy for all the sins of those for whom He died." But He must have atoned for all their sins, including unbelief, "otherwise Christ is not a complete Saviour of any."⁵ Moreover, Scripture clearly teaches that men are punished for sins other than rejecting Christ, such as those mentioned in JUDE.⁶

Next Buchanan turns his attention to the sort of Scriptural passages which Erskine holds teach universal atonement. He makes the expected point that such passages do not necessarily signify all men absolutely; they can be indefinite as well as universal. He cites 1 TIM. 1:15, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

Did Christ come with the purpose of actually saving all sinners? If one interprets indefinite terms universally, he argues, unacceptable conclusions follows. For instance: JN. 1:9 would mean that absolutely all men are enlightened; ROM. 5:18, that all are justified; LK 19:10, that all are saved. As for texts like 2 COR. 5:14 ("one died for all") and 1 TIM. 2:6 ("a ransom for all"), "It may be - all the elect - all the sheep - as well as all men."⁷ From an unspecific universal term one cannot deduce specific universality.

Furthermore, Buchanan feels that there are many other passages which explicitly specify the design of Christ's atoning work. He died for His sheep, JN. 10:15; His Church, ACTS 20:28, EPH. 5:25; God's children, JN. 11:52, HEB. 2:14; His people, MATT. 1:21, LK. 1:68. Again, His intention in dying was not merely to make salvation generally available but actually to save His elect people from their sins: MATT. 1:21, GAL. 4:4-5, EPH. 2:15-16, 1 TIM. 1:15, HEB. 13:12. Buchanan sets these points in the context of a federal theology, maintaining that the true question is not whether Christ's death is sufficient to save all, but for whom Christ became a sponsor and surety in the Covenant of Grace. Those He federally undertook to save, must needs be saved; hence He cannot have died to save all. He once more quotes Brown of Wamphray to this effect.

Buchanan then criticises the Freeness for its silence on Christ's active as opposed to His passive obedience. According to Calvinistic orthodoxy, Christ's passive obedience (His suffering) purchases forgiveness of sins, whereas His active obedience (His sinless adherence to the precepts of the Law) purchases eternal life for the elect. Buchanan quotes Jonathan Edwards to substantiate this.⁸ Erskine, however, mentions only Christ's suffer-

ing, which He says secures forgiveness for all men absolutely. . On what ground does he omit reference to Christ's positive merit? If Christ suffered for all, He also obeyed for all, and thus purchased heaven for all, which means the salvation of all. "This will be felt to be a serious difficulty, on the scheme of universal redemption, unless you come at length to believe in what you at present deny, the doctrine of universal salvation."⁹

Inevitably, Buchanan criticises Erskine's definition of justification, quoting Owen against it¹⁰, and documents some of Erskine's inconsistencies as to the meaning of pardon.¹¹ He also takes Erskine to task for denying that God needs to be reconciled to sinners, citing ISA. 12:1, "although Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away," and EZEK. 16:63, "when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done."

Buchanan traces Erskine's inconsistencies partly to his peculiar terminology:

Perhaps much of this apparent contradiction may have arisen from the very original use of old terms, which is not the best feature of the work ... There is reason to fear that the substitution of this new phraseology for that of the older divines, would little tend to the improvement of British theology ...¹²

This, as we have seen, is a typical criticism.

Finally, Buchanan rejects with a tu quoque Erskine's criticism of orthodoxy for limiting the atonement to the elect but offering it to all. Erskine has the same problem, he argues, in that he offers Christ to all for sanctification, but limits sanctification to some by the decree of election.¹³ This mention of Erskine's belief

in election prompts us to quote an earlier passage from the Letter in which Buchanan explicitly notes Erskine's orthodoxy in this matter, adding a contemporary confirmation to our own observations on this point:

Some have ignorantly supposed that Mr. Erskine denies the doctrine of election. On the contrary, it occurs frequently in his writings, and is often beautifully illustrated. The peculiarity of his opinion, on this subject, consists in his holding, that election is manifested, not in limiting the atonement, but in revealing the atonement to the soul of the sinner; or, in other words, that election has no reference to pardon, but only to sanctification. This, however, only removes the difficulty from one point to another, where it begets other difficulties much more formidable than itself.¹⁴

Erskine had not yet abandoned Calvinism; he had only adapted and modified it.

The Letter closes in the following vein:

Such are the remarks which have occurred to me after repeatedly perusing your work; but they cannot conceal from me the high excellence of its spirit, and the exquisite beauty of its style. It is a holy book, and no reflecting reader can rise from the perusal of it without many sacred impressions of religion, and much affection for the author. But the fascinations of its eloquence may render even its errors popular: and never is religion in greater danger, than when any of its distinguished advocates deviate from the simple truth of the Bible.¹⁵

Plainly Buchanan classes Erskine among Christianity's "distinguished advocates", and this is borne out by the mild spirit in which he conducts his case against the Freeness throughout his Letter. In other words, we are confronted yet again with the essential and typical reaction

to the Freeness on the part of the conventional Evangelical and especially Calvinistic world: a book of piety, but alas! of error too. Such was manifestly James Buchanan's reluctant verdict.

(b) Asahel Nettleton

Asahel Nettleton (1783 - 1844) was a notable American Congregationalist who espoused both a conservative Calvinistic theology and a commitment to revivalist preaching. He is significant in American church history for his prominent opposition to the Arminianising theology and sensational evangelistic methods of Charles Finney, against which Nettleton placed the orthodox doctrines of human inability, election and regeneration, and a relatively unemotional (and very effective) kind of revival preaching, such as had been more typical of the first American Great Awakening. It is interesting to see how this representative of American old guard Calvinism reacted to Erskine's new theology as expressed in the Freeness.

Nettleton's response to the Freeness is outlined in a letter to the American Congregationalist divine Leonard Woods (1774 - 1854), professor of theology in Andover Seminary, Massachusetts. The letter is dated 6th May 1829, and its relevant portions are as follows:

You have, doubtless, read Erskine on the Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel. The writer doubtless wishes to promote the cause of religion. But the tendency of the work, I do think, is directly to defeat that object ... This is the most plausible scheme of Universalism that I have ever seen. If mankind can only be made to believe that their sins are pardoned, this will make them love God - restore the key-stone of the arch - sanctify them, give them peace of conscience, and justify them. Now, all this being taken for granted, without one text to prove it, and with the whole Bible against

him, ('He that believeth not is condemned already, and the wrath of God abideth on him', etc.,) he adopts every method in his power to make all his readers believe that their sins are pardoned. To doubt this must be a great crime. Unbelief is the greatest sin; and the more conscience awakes to perform its office of conviction, the more guilty and criminal is the sinner for listening to its admonitions. When the Spirit of God is convincing of sin, and the commandment comes and sin revives; and when the sinner sees and feels that he is lost, and needs pardon, he tries to take it off by convincing him that it is all false alarm. If he does not believe that his sins are pardoned before he has one thought of repentance, or of asking it, the poor man makes God a liar: 'He that believeth not,' - i.e., that his sins are pardoned, - 'hath made Him a liar.'

The evil produced by such a book, from the pen of one who has already acquired a reputation as a writer and a Christian, cannot be calculated in this world. Here are false views of faith, of the atonement, of pardon, and of justification, which he makes to consist in a sense of pardon, - there is no such thing as evidence of a change of heart, - but believing that our sins are pardoned will produce that change, make us love God, and thus give peace and confidence, and restore the key-stone of the arch!

I cannot but express my full conviction, that the sentiments contained in that book are more directly calculated to prevent conviction of sin, and to put a stop to genuine revivals of religion, than anything which has ever been published.¹⁶

Nettleton links Erskine's views with those of Walter Marshall (1628 - 80) and James Hervey (1714 - 58), both of whom had argued that the conviction that one is justified arises immediately out of trusting Christ for salvation. Controversy over Marshall and Hervey's views

of assurance is to be found in the pages of the Edinburgh Christian Instructor at this very time, sparked off by the primary controversy over the views of César Malan and the French revivalists.¹⁷ Nettleton sets Erskine's views in this light. This produces a somewhat slanted appreciation of Erskine's theology of pardon, since (as we have seen) Erskine did not mean by "pardon" what more conventional divines like Marshall or Hervey meant. "All are pardoned", in Erskine's language, could be seen as the equivalent of "all are invited to come to Christ for salvation" in Marshall and Hervey's. Erskine, at this point in his career, certainly did not wish all sinners to believe that none of them would end up in hell. Unfortunately, he did say that merely believing that one is pardoned will guarantee entrance into heaven, due to the sanctifying influence of this belief, and this was enough to draw Nettleton's devastating fire. A major part of the problem lies in Erskine's peculiar and confusing terminology. James Haldane could cheerfully assert that the mere perception of God's offered grace in Christ was sufficient to beget a living faith.¹⁸ Erskine was at one level saying nothing more than this, albeit in a vocabulary designed for obfuscation. Yet he was saying more; for he also wanted all sinners to believe that, regardless of their own spiritual state, God looked on them with a reconciled favour in which there was no room for condemnation. In the last resort one can blame only Erskine for the obloquy he drew on himself from men like Nettleton, since the conflicting elements in the theology of the Freeness, and its twisted phraseology, were calculated to provoke suspicion and misunderstanding even where Erskine was uttering a substantially orthodox truth.

Conspicuous by its absence in Nettleton's evaluation of the Freeness is any conciliatory reference to its piety. No doubt the American evangelist must have deemed that a

specious piety which was adapted "to put a stop to genuine revivals of religion".

(c) Ralph Wardlaw

Ralph Wardlaw, whom we have encountered before in this thesis, was the most distinguished Scottish theologian to champion the cause of moral government theology. Originally trained for the Associate Secession Church, Wardlaw converted to Congregationalism in 1800 and became pastor of an Independent chapel in Glasgow in 1803. From 1811 he was professor of systematic theology at Glasgow Theological Academy.

At the time of the publication of the Freeness, Wardlaw was well-known and respected among British Evangelicals for his doctrinal writings, especially his Discourses on the Socinian Controversy (1814). He was acquainted with Erskine, both on a personal basis, and from his Remarks and Essay on Faith. Erskine and Wardlaw spent New Year's Eve 1827 in one another's company, as we saw.

Wardlaw's initial reaction to the Freeness is found in a letter to Leonard Woods, dated 16th June 1829 - the same Woods to whom Nettleton had written a month previously. As a moral government man who believed that Christ died for all, Wardlaw might have been expected to react rather favourably to Erskine's emphasis on the universality of the gospel. However, he was so pained by the notion of universal pardon that his reaction ran as follows:

I have seldom if ever perused a book with more mingled feelings, of approbation and disapprobation, delight and sorrow. I love the man [Erskine] . Everyone that knows him must love him. I looked upon his works on account of their coming from an educated and accomplished layman, and of the style in which they were written, in which there

is so much of taste and elegance of mind, as eminently fitted to do good in a particular circle of society. I was therefore grieved that there should be any statements in that little publication, and on such a subject, such as I could not approve ... You will see that I refer especially to his views of pardon and collateral topics, with which I cannot agree, and which I think confused and hardly consistent with themselves. But then there is so much that is excellent; many of his illustrations are so exquisitely fine; and there is such a tone of humble, tender, delightful feeling, as well as of pure, and lofty, and sublime devotion runs through it - something in all his exhibitions of the Divine Being that makes you feel at the same moment your immeasurable distance and your gracious nearness, filling the soul at once with humble, solemn awe, and with filial delight, and joy, and melting affection - that one hardly knows how to find fault. 19

Comment would be superfluous on such an eloquent testimony.

Wardlaw's theological unhappiness with the Freeness found public and crystal-clear expression in his Two Essays: (1) On the Assurance of Faith (2) On the Extent of the Atonement and Universal Pardon, published in 1830, by which time the controversy surrounding Erskine and his collaborators had grown far more intense and Wardlaw had lost his inhibitions about finding fault with the laird of Linlathen. However, we must defer consideration of this volume to a later point, since it deals not only with the Freeness, but also with Erskine's Introductory Essay to Extracts of Letters to a Christian friend, by a Lady (1830).

(d) Thomas Chalmers

Chalmers' reaction to the Freeness is recorded by Hanna

in his Memoirs of Chalmers. Chalmers delivered his opinion in the winter months of 1829, by which period the debate about the extent of the atonement and universal pardon had embroiled McLeod Campbell as well as Erskine, becoming known as the "Row heresy", after Campbell's parish, or the "Gareloch heresy", after that parish's locality. The relevant portions of Hanna read thus:

Mr Erskine's treatise on the 'Freeness of the Gospel' had appeared to many to run counter to the strict doctrine of Calvinism ... but [Chalmers'] strong convictions as to the unconditional freeness of the gospel offer, and his substantial agreement with many of the leading doctrines of those generally denominated 'Marrowmen', disposed him to judge mildly of the errors of Mr. Erskine and Mr. Campbell. It was during this winter that an intelligent friend residing generally in the country called upon him in Edinburgh ... 'We had some conversation,' says this friend, in describing the interview, 'about the heresy [the Row heresy] . Dr. Chalmers said over and over again that he thought Mr. Erskine's 'Freeness' one of the most delightful books that had ever been written. It seems to me that the Gospel had never appeared to him in any very different light from that in which Mr. Erskine represents it. He regrets that there is any controversy, for he thinks that there is little difference. That everyone is already pardoned he thinks clearly contrary to Scripture; and he objects to Mr. Erskine seeming to think that those who have not received this truth have not received the Gospel. "'I don't like,' he said, 'narrowing the broad basis of the Gospel to the pin-point speculations of an individual brain. One thing (he added, and his countenance assumed a look of deep feeling) I fear, I do fear that the train of his thoughts might ultimately lead Mr. Erskine to doubt the eternity of future punishments. Now that would be going sadly against Scripture.'"20

Chalmers the preacher was delighted by the Freeness's winsome and vivid presentation of God's mercy to all sinners,

calling on them all to trust immediately and simply in Christ alone for eternal life. This entirely accorded with Chalmers' own convictions about the free gospel offer. It is also interesting that Chalmers should think that there was "little difference" between Erskine and his opponents. Presumably Chalmers felt that the dispute was mostly over words rather than realities - a view certainly rejected by Erskine himself. Inevitably, however, Chalmers repudiated the doctrine of universal pardon as "clearly contrary to Scripture". However much he agreed with Erskine that God invited all sinners to receive His grace in the gospel, he held that they were under condemnation and wrath until they did so. This calls for no comment in the light of our previous discussion of orthodox responses to the Freeness.

More ominously, Chalmers prophesied Erskine's future Universalism, as indeed we have seen others do - although it may seem somewhat perplexing that Chalmers should do this if he thought there was "little difference" between Erskine and his foes. Perhaps he meant that on the specific matter of the free offer of the gospel there was virtual agreement, but that other elements in Erskine's thought, elements of emphasis and theological style, pointed towards Universalism. The prophecy proved accurate, at any rate.

We must at this point indulge in a lengthy pause to examine what Chalmers himself believed about the extent of the atonement. We have noted before that he was to play a strangely ambiguous part in the Row controversy, in keen contrast to the decisive and passionate stance adopted by his colleague Dr. Andrew Thomson against Erskine and Campbell. Hanna gives us the key to this puzzle in the reported remark of Chalmers' unnamed friend: "It seems to me that the Gospel had never appeared to

him Chalmers in any very different light from that in which Mr. Erskine represents it." This remark we must now substantiate from Chalmers' own writings, focusing on the twin issues of the love of God and the extent of the atonement.

In his Institutes of Theology, Chalmers has a chapter entitled The Universality of the Gospel. Its opening words run thus:

I cannot but think that the doctrine of Particular Redemption has been expounded by many of its defenders in such a way as to give an unfortunate aspect to the Christian dispensation. As often treated, we hold it to be a most unpractical and useless theory and not easy to be vindicated without the infliction of an unnatural violence on many passages of Scripture ... But far its worst effect is that it acts as a drag and a deduction from the freeness of the gospel. Its ministers are made to feel the chilling influence of a limitation upon their warrant. If Christ died only for the elect, and not for all, they are puzzled to understand how they should proceed with the calls and invitations of the gospel.²¹

He then complains that

a message so constructed as that it might circulate round the globe and by which the blessings of the upper sanctuary are made as accessible to one and all of the species as the light or the air or any of the cheap and common bounties of nature, has now, since its wings of diffusiveness and glory have been clipped by the hands of controversialists, shrunk and shrivelled into the dimensions of their own narrow sectarianism.²²

He compares this shrivelled gospel to the impoverished science of the middle ages, and although lamenting that

a similar medievalism still afflicts the gospel he looks forward soon to a brighter day:

There is still a remainder of the old spell, even the spell of human authority, and by which a certain cramp or confinement has been laid on the genius of Christianity. We cannot doubt that the time of its complete emancipation is coming, when it shall break loose from the imprisonment in which it is held; but meanwhile there is as it were a stricture upon it not yet wholly removed, and in virtue of which the largeness and liberality of heaven's own purposes have been made to descend in partial and scanty droppings through the strainers of an artificial theology, instead of falling as they ought in a universal shower upon the world.²³

Let us take note of what Chalmers is saying. The doctrine of particular redemption - that is, limited atonement - as "often" explained by "many" of its advocates, is a "useless theory" which does "unnatural violence" to Scripture. It spoils the "freeness of the gospel"; preachers do not see how to invite all to Christ "if Christ died only for the elect, and not for all". He then immediately launches into a purple passage about the destructive influence of "human authority" on religious truth - "cramp", "confinement", "stricture", "imprisonment", "artificial theology", being the effects of this. One cannot read these paragraphs without feeling that Chalmers is working himself up to an enlightened rejection of limited atonement.

In fact, the rest of the chapter contains nothing so explicit, and it leaves one wondering what exactly Chalmers had in mind. But at least we can see how manifestly unhappy he felt with widely accepted notions of limited atonement.

Some passages in this chapter of the Institutes go further than this. The following quotations, for instance, make it clear that Chalmers believed that God loved all men so as to desire earnestly that they should all be saved:

There never was a more injurious management than to mix up the doctrine of election with the first overtures of the gospel, as if this would give a more pointed and particular application to them, instead of which it is the direct road to a darkening of the whole message, and making the application of it impossible. The announcement of good-will to men might tell in lighting up a joy in the hearts of all who believe it, for all know themselves to be men. The announcement of good-will to the elect would light up joy in the hearts of none, even though they believed it, for none know themselves at the outset of their Christianity to be elect.²⁴

Here we have, in the context of "the first overtures of the gospel", the declaration of God's love or good-will to all men - that is, God's love revealed specifically in the gospel as extending to all men and not only to the elect, such a love as "lights up joy in the hearts of all" who hear of it and credit what they hear.

We ought therefore to proceed on the obvious representations which Scripture gives of the Deity, and these beheld in their own immediate light, untinged by the dogma of Predestination. God waiting to be gracious - God not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance - God swearing by Himself that He has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that all should come to Him and live - God beseeching men to enter into reconciliation, and this not as elect, but simply and generally as men and sinners: these are the attitudes in which the Father of the human family sets Himself forth unto the world - these are the terms in which He speaks to us from

Heaven. Now what we affirm, what we zealously affirm, is, that the gospel is not adequately rendered, if the full and natural force of these exhibitions be not brought to bear on the hearts of all men.²⁵

The next quotation is even more significant. Imagining two hearers of the gospel, one who believes and one who doesn't, Chalmers says:

The love wherewith God loved the world so as to send His only begotten Son into it, ought to be urged on both these inhabitants of the world - in the very same style of entreaty and unreserved assurance - and that for the purpose of awakening in them the same confidence and calling forth the same gratitude for the good-will from heaven thus manifested to the one just as it is to the other.²⁶

This makes no sense unless the death of Christ reveals the love of God to all men. What would it mean to "urge" God's love on someone He didn't love? How could such an urging awaken "confidence" and "gratitude"? How could it be said that God's love had been "manifested to the one just as it is to the other", viz. to him who believes this good news and to him who rejects it? Chalmers' insistence that God's love for the world must be urged on all the world's inhabitants indiscriminately, so that unless resisted it will naturally awaken "the same confidence and the same gratitude for the good-will from heaven thus manifested to the one just as it is to the other", inevitably means that the world which God so loved as to send His Son to die, must in Chalmers' mind have been the world of all humanity without exception. This is a crucial interpretation of JN. 3:16, whose term "world" has normally been reckoned by Calvinists to mean either

"the world of the elect" or else "all men without distinction, all sorts of men". That Chalmers took it to refer to God's universal love is confirmed a few sentences after this passage where he speaks of "a longing affection on the part of their Creator" towards all sinners in the context of the gospel offer.²⁷

There is one other significant passage in this chapter in which Chalmers conflates ROM. 3:25 and 1 JN. 2:2 to produce the following:

Now for the specific end of conversion, the available Scripture is not that Christ laid down His life for the sheep, but that Christ is set forth a propitiation for the sins of the world. It is not because I know myself to be one of the sheep or one of the elect, but because I know myself to be one of the world, that I take to myself the calls and promises of the New Testament.²⁸

Here Chalmers fuses the reference of ROM. 3:25 to the historical transaction of Calvary - "whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in His blood", - with the reference of 1 JN. 2:2 to the exalted Christ's present ministry - "He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the whole world" - and interprets the resulting conflation as indicating the world of all men without exception, in specific contrast to JN. 10:15 with its limited reference to the sheep. We have here, then, a declaration by Chalmers of a belief in some sort of universal reference in the atonement, in the context of propitiation and the gospel offer.

Apart from this chapter, volume two of Chalmers' Institutes contains other references which indicate sympathy with the doctrine of universal atonement. He seems quite happy to use such general language as that Christ was "crucified

as an atonement for the sins of the world"²⁹, "Christ died an expiation for the sins of mankind"³⁰, "Christ died a propitiation for the sins of the whole world"³¹. It could be argued, however, that these are simply biblical phrases. More pointedly, then, he affirms that believing the Bible involves "faith in Christ as your propitiation"³². Referring to those who make the proposition "Christ died for my sins" the primary object of saving faith, he says:

I do not object, you will observe, to the object of their faith being in this particular form, that He died for my sins - as I hold that the precious terms of all and any and whosoever wherein the overtures of the gospel are couched, abundantly warrant this blessed appropriation.³³

He affirms that "every man in the world has a right to entertain it [the gospel] as a message to himself", and thus entertaining it "he has the very same warrant that Paul had in saying, Christ died for me and gave Himself for me."³⁴ In a striking passage, he lists a number of texts which he feels "each individual may hold ... as pointedly and specifically addressed to himself". Among these he mentions his conflation of ROM. 3:25 and 1 JN. 2:2, and also 1 TIM. 1:15, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." "I do not see," he comments, "how any designations can at all be devised more comprehensive than these."³⁵ Evidently, therefore, he interprets "sinners" in 1 TIM. 1:15 as meaning all sinners comprehensively. In his notes on George Hill's divinity lectures, he even goes so far as to say:

I cannot but express my regret that the question between universal and particular redemption should ever have been stirred. I do not think that the interests of truth or the maintenance of essential orthodoxy required it ... There is a sense in which

Christ died for all men - by His death He brought in an everlasting righteousness, which, in the ipsissima verba of Scripture, is unto all and upon all who believe; and our business is to urge this gospel on the acceptance of one and all. This is true; and yet it is just as true that none but they who believe shall finally be saved. This is all I should feel inclined to state on the head of this particular controversy ... 36

Turning to Chalmers' published sermons, we find similar sentiments. We may take as a good example a discourse on 1 JN. 4:19, "We love Him because He first loved us," in which Chalmers maintains that an unbelieving sinner can be induced to love God only by the knowledge that God has first loved him.

There appears to be no other way, by which a responding affection can be deposited in the heart of man ... God, who knew what was in man, seems to have known, that in his dark and guilty bosom, there was but one solitary hold that He had over him viz., man's capacity to respond to love ; and that to reach it, He must just put on a look of graciousness, and tell us that He has no pleasure in our death, and manifest towards us the longings of a bereaved parent, and even humble Himself to a suppliant in the cause of our return, and send a gospel of peace into the world, and bid His messengers to bear throughout all its habitations the tidings of His good-will to the children of men. This is the topic of His most anxious and repeated demonstration. This manifested good-will of God to His creatures, is the band of love, and the cord of a man, by which He draws them.³⁷

Chalmers' message is plain: a sinner dead in sins and trespasses will be drawn to God only by the gospel of His indiscriminate love. Such love Chalmers sees as

the specifically converting power of the gospel:

As soon as His love of kindness is believed, so soon does the love of gratitude spring up in the heart of the believer. As soon as man gives up his fear and his suspicion of God, and discerns Him to be His friend, so soon does he render Him the homage of a willing and affectionate loyalty ... It is thus that the faith which recognises God, as God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, lies at the turning point of conversion.³⁸

God has displayed His loving-kindness to every human being in the gift of salvation in Christ; the recognition of this is what converts sinners from God's enemies into God's friends.

... after their eyes are opened to the marvellous spectacle of a pleading, and offering, and beseeching God, holding out eternal life to the guilty, through the propitiation which His Son hath made for them, they must from that moment open their whole souls to the influence of gratitude, and love the God who thus hath first loved them.³⁹

Clearly if language is to be meaningful, we have here a sustained emphasis on the universal aspects of the atonement. Christ is said to have "made propitiation" for the unbelievers whose condition Chalmers is describing, and God is said to have thus "first loved them".

Chalmers' other evangelistic sermons are marked by the same emphasis. A few instances must suffice:

His tender mercy is now free to rejoice amid all the glory of His other bright and untarnished perfections and He pours the expression of this tenderness with an unsparing hand over the whole extent of His

sinful creation; and He lets Himself down to the language of a beseeching supplicant, praying that each and every one of us might be reconciled unto Him ... 40

Such is the real aspect of God towards you. He cannot bear that His alienated children should be finally and everlastingly away from Him. He feels for you all with the longing of a parent bereaved of His offspring. To woo you back again unto Himself, He scatters among you the largest and the most liberal assurances; and with a tone of imploring tenderness does He say to one and all of you, 'Turn ye, turn ye, why will you die?' 41

... the alternative is fairly proposed, to come on the merit of your own obedience, and be tried by it, or to come on the merit of the obedience of Christ, and receive in your own person the reward which He hath purchased for you ... 42

... I am asked, which of the things it is that is most fitted to arrest a convicted sinner, in the midst of his cries and prayers for deliverance, - I would say, that it was Christ lifted up on the cross for his offences, and pouring out the blood of that mighty expiation, by which the guilt of them all is washed away. This is the rock on which he will build all his hopes of acceptance before God. 43

Be assured that you waste your efforts on a hopeless impracticability, when you labour to win this privilege heaven for yourselves. Receive Christ by faith; and lay a confident hold on the propitiation made by that Saviour, who 'became sin for you although He knew no sin, that you might be made the righteousness of God in Him.' 44

God laid on Him the iniquities of us all [Chalmers is specifically addressing unbelievers] ; and He became sin for us though he knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. That we might be freed from the curse of the law, did the only beloved Son of God become a curse for us; and on the accursed tree, did He bear the full weight of the condemnation and the penalty, that we else should have borne. He was stricken for our transgressions. The chastisement of our peace was laid upon Him; and, in bowing Himself down to the burden of a world's atonement, did He pour out His soul even unto the death for us. In that hour of darkness and mystery, when the great lawgiver awakened the sword of vengeance against His fellow - then it was that our debt was paid to the last farthing; for then it was, that the Captain of our salvation drunk to its last dregs that cup which the Father had put into His hands. Then it was, that our discharge was fully made out; and, hearken to us - if ye believe not these tidings of great joy, you remain listless or alienated or heavy laden as before; but oh the power and victory of faith! What a mountain is lifted off by it, and how the sinner's soul breaks forth as if into a land of light and love and liberty, when, enabled to lay hold on Christ, the discharge is put into his hands, and he now rests in the assurance that all is clear with God.⁴⁵

Chalmers says that God's saving mercy is poured over the whole extent of His sinful creation - that God feels for all lost sinners with the longing of a bereaved parent - that Christ has purchased the reward of eternal life for unbelievers - that a sinner's hope of acceptance with God rests on his seeing Christ lifted up on the cross for his offences - that Christ became sin for unbelievers, took their condemnation and punishment, and paid their debt to the last farthing. Little wonder, then, that Chalmers' reaction to the Freeness was as largely favourable as that of Ralph Wardlaw, who also held to universal

atonement, although both theologians balked at universal pardon.

Towards the close of Chalmers' life, after the tumultuous events of the Disruption, the great Scottish churchman wrote a letter to Erskine. They had been on holiday together in France some years previously, in 1838, and Chalmers expresses himself thus:

I most cordially agree with you in thinking that our journey through Normandy should never be forgotten. In good earnest I assure you that I often look back upon it as the most brilliant and interesting passage of my bygone life ... I should rejoice if we met eye to eye. I feel convinced of a radical and essential unity betwixt us, however diverse and distorting the media might be between our respective visions and certain of those questions on which we may chance to differ.⁴⁶

This is a most revealing utterance, and one which could never have been made by any of Erskine's avowed opponents, especially when one considers that by the time that Chalmers wrote this letter (December 1843) Erskine had completely repudiated Calvinism and embraced an Irvingite Christology, a non-penal view of the atonement, and a fully Universalist eschatology. Yet Chalmers can write this off as a mere matter of "distorting media", "certain questions on which we may chance to differ" which cannot affect their "essential unity". Does this not inform us of a pregnant fact about Chalmers' own theology? Are we not bound to conclude that Chalmers, however Calvinistic at heart he may have been, was yet significantly removed from the strict Calvinism of Westminster orthodoxy?

A remark Chalmers once made about confessions of faith

- and it is difficult not to believe that he had the Westminster Confession in mind - substantiates the above conclusion. He said:

I look on Catechisms and Confessions as mere landmarks against heresy. If there had been no heresy, they wouldn't have been wanted. It's putting them out of their place to look on them as magazines of truth. There's some of your stour orthodox folk just over-ready to stretch the Bible to square with their Catechism: all very well, all very needful as a landmark, but what I say is, do not let that wretched mutilated thing come between me and the Bible.⁴⁷

The description of the Westminster Confession as "that wretched mutilated thing" is at least interesting in relation to Chalmers' orthodoxy.

Let us conclude by returning to the subject which prompted this discussion, viz. the extent of the atonement. A man's final words on a subject may be held to be of peculiar importance, and Chalmers gave utterance to his beliefs on the scope of his Saviour's death as he lay on his own deathbed. A fellow Free Church minister, Gemmel of Fairlie, called on Chalmers on 30th May 1847, and conversed with him at length. The doctor was confined to bed, and it was in fact his last day on earth. Their conversation came round to the subject of latitudinarianism in theology. Gemmel mentioned Richard Baxter as an example of a latitudinarian, for Baxter held that Christ died for all men. The following was Chalmers' response:

Yes: Baxter holds that Christ died for all men; but I cannot say that I am quite at one with what some of our friends have written on the subject of the atonement. I do not, for example, entirely agree with what Mr. Haldane says on that subject. I think that

the word world, as applied in Scripture to the sacrifice of Christ, has been unnecessarily restricted; the common way of explaining it is, that it simply includes Gentiles as well as Jews. I do not like that explanation; and I think that there is one text that puts that interpretation entirely aside. The text to which I allude is, that 'God commandeth all men, everywhere to repent.'⁴⁸

The term "world" as related to Christ's death meant "all men everywhere", in Chalmers' estimation. He believed that God so loved all men everywhere that He gave His only begotten Son to die as a pledge of that love. Only so, it seems, could this great preacher accept the unlimited offer of Christ in the gospel.

Equipped with this knowledge, we are now in a position to understand the role Chalmers played in the Row controversy, as described in the following pages.

IV. THE ROW CONTROVERSY, 1828 - 31

(i) Opening thrusts : Erskine, Campbell, Scott and Irving

We do not know exactly when Erskine met John McLeod Campbell. Specifically, we do not know whether this meeting took place before or after the publication of The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel. But we do know that this momentous meeting occurred very near to the book's publication, either just before or just after, i.e. in late 1827 or early 1828, so that even if it took place before the Freeness was published it would have been too late to affect the contents of that book.¹ Campbell's own testimony as to his first encounter with Erskine was uncertain:

I am unable to say to myself with confidence whether it was in 1827 or 1828 that dear Scott took me to him [Erskine], as to one who knew that love of God in which we were seeing eye to eye.²

However, according to Hanna it was when Campbell preached in Edinburgh that Erskine first came in contact with him. The sermon was a proclamation of those convictions about the extent of God's love and the practical assurance thereof which had already become so precious to Erskine, and Erskine is reported as having remarked with deep feeling afterwards, "I have heard today from that pulpit what I believe to be the true gospel."³ Presumably it must have been very soon after this that Erskine and Campbell were personally introduced to one another - by A.J. Scott, according to Campbell's account, cited above. Scott already knew both men; he had become acquainted with Erskine in 1826, as previously noted, and he had known Campbell since September 1827. When he brought Erskine

and Campbell together, the final link was forged in a three-way friendship which was to have profound personal and theological consequences.

McLeod Campbell (1800 - 72) had been pastor of the Church of Scotland parish of Row (modern spelling "Rhu") since September 1825. Having begun his ministry as an elementary Calvinist in doctrine, Campbell's pastoral experience had occasioned a shift in his thinking, possibly aided by A.J. Scott, so that by the end of 1827 he was preaching God's soteric love for all, universal atonement and pardon through the death of Christ, and assurance as being of the essence of faith. The story of Campbell's early theological development is a fascinating one, and we have devoted an appendix to the subject (Appendix IV), to which the reader may turn for fuller information. But the important point to grasp is that by the time McLeod Campbell met Erskine, he had already arrived at a theological position similar if not quite identical to that expounded by the laird of Linlathen in his Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel.

Campbell's substantial agreement with the doctrine of the Freeness did not augur well for him, given the almost unanimously negative reaction to that work on the part of the organs of public religious opinion. It meant that his theology of universal grace, which had already caused a few rumblings, had through Erskine now received an unlooked-for blaze of adverse publicity. Erskine himself, however, according to his own testimony, was almost philosophically prepared for this public lashing. He explained why in a letter to Thomas Chalmers, dated 19th July 1828:

I looked for the opposition of all regular theologians, and for the concurrence of untheological Christians in general - for, whatever the logical system of a Christian

may be, I am persuaded that the free, undeserved, and general love of God to the world, to the sinful family of Adam, is the true ground on which each individual of our race must rest. I know no other and see no other in the Bible. The particular love is manifested in revealing to each individual the knowledge of the general love; but it is not on the particular revelation that a man can or ought to rest - it is on the general love thus revealed to him ... At the same time, I believe that a man may be very right whilst he thinks my view of it [universal pardon] very wrong.⁴

This marks a significant development in Erskine's attitude. For the first time we find him looking on "theology" as the enemy - that is, the Calvinistic theology of his native land, with its various qualifications and reservations about the love of God in relation to the world at large, and its contrary emphasis on His special electing love towards those who were to be redeemed. The stress of Erskine's religious thought was now running in a direction opposite to that of traditional Scottish Calvinism, and Erskine was conscious of that unhappy fact. Hence "I looked for the opposition of all regular theologians". Yet he also looked for "the concurrence of untheological Christians in general" - those whose minds had not been perverted by "the logical system" of high Calvinism as focused in its doctrine of limited atonement. Indeed, with a broad gesture of liberalism, Erskine conceded that even those who condemned the Freeness could well be "very right" as Christians even though very wrong as theologians. How this concession coheres with Erskine's emphasis on the vital practical necessity of believing the right doctrines is a moot point. Moreover, the concession has a historical fascination, given that Erskine would very soon be contrasting the faith of the Westminster Confession with the theology of himself and McLeod Camp-

bell in terms of "man's religion" against "God's religion". One feels that his concession could not really have meant very much if it could coexist with that kind of fiercely polarised attitude. The explanation is probably that at the time he made this concession Erskine did not see cause to adopt such a gladiatorial stance, being moved to do so only as the gathering storms of controversy burst on the luckless McLeod Campbell's head in 1829 - 30. In July 1828 he could still afford to be liberal.

It is also significant that Erskine felt free to write to Chalmers in this candid vein. Plainly he expected sympathy from Chalmers for his doctrinal views. The letter as recorded by Hanna begins: "I am much gratified by what you say of Mrs. Chalmers' opinion of my work".⁵ Mrs. Chalmers must evidently have appreciated at least some aspects of the Freeness, even as we know that her husband deemed it "one of the most delightful books that had ever been written", and Chalmers passed on his wife's appreciative comments to Erskine.

Mrs. Chalmers may have appreciated the Freeness, but West Port Independent chapel in Dundee did not. This was the congregation pastored by the moderate Calvinist David Russell, with which Erskine had been connected over the preceding decade. The details are unfortunately lost, but we know that Erskine was excommunicated from Russell's congregation sometime in 1828 - that is, debarred from taking part in holy communion.⁶ Since West Port chapel was Congregationalist in its policy, we can only assume that this was a decision taken by the whole church collectively. It was, no doubt, the result of the heterodox views expressed by Erskine in the Freeness; such, at least, seems to be at once the most obvious and most reasonable interpretation, implied both by Hanna and Dr. Newell.⁷ It is corroborated by the fact that the following year,

1829, Erskine had to suffer the public repudiation of his theological views by his ex-pastor in a work entitled The Way of Salvation. Russell, like his fellow moderate Calvinist Ralph Wardlaw, was not prepared to see the cause of a temperate, reasonable, moral government Calvinism brought into disrepute by the exaggeration and one-sidedness of an Erskine or a McLeod Campbell.

Erskine's hopes for a positive response to the Freeness on the part of ordinary Christians were thus frustrated as far as West Port chapel was concerned. Instead, he found that the publication of his liberal views was having the effect of weakening his ties with the orthodox Evangelical world. The doctrinal shift was beginning to become a social shift as well.

John McLeod Campbell, in the meantime, was deeply pondering the nature and implications of his doctrine of assurance. In an attempt to clarify his thinking and buttress his position, Campbell had taken to studying the doctrine from an historical theology perspective, and by April 1828 he felt able to claim the substantial support of Walter Marshall, James Hervey, John Glas, Robert Sandeman, Thomas Boston, John Barclay and Archibald McLean. All of these writers had, in one form or another, insisted on the vital significance for Christian faith of an assurance of God's grace in Christ - although a veritable maze of debate breaks upon our view when we ask whether this means assurance of the sufficiency of grace for all men in the atonement, the particular reference of grace offered in the gospel, or the reality of grace personally experienced in faith, and what the relationship is between these, as well as the Biblical warrant for such conceptions. Into that debate as it relates to Marshall, Hervey et al, we cannot at present enter. We can, however, take note of this new historico-theological perspective in

the controversy surrounding Campbell's teaching. It was to be taken up again by other participants in the dispute. Erskine had already tried to enlist the theological aid of Luther in the Freeness for his leading idea of universal pardon⁸, a claim hotly contested by Dr. Andrew Thomson in his volume of sermons on that topic⁹; Asahel Nettleton, reviewing the Freeness, had concluded that it was an untimely repristination of Marshall and Hervey's defective doctrine¹⁰. Someone, probably Robert Story of Rosneath, produced a treatise entitled Extracts on Faith from the Writings of the Reformers to vindicate the Protestant orthodoxy of the followers of Erskine and Campbell, which went into its third edition in 1830¹¹. In the same year but from the opposite camp, the Edinburgh Christian Instructor carried an article in its May issue, in which the writer constructed an alternative historical pedigree for the "Gareloch heresy":

Mr. C. [Campbell] , we suspect, is not entirely unacquainted with the Doctors of Saumur; he has heard surely of John Cameron and Moses Amyraut, the hypothetical universalists; at all events he is no stranger to Dr. Tobias Crisp, to Sandeman, and famous Count Zinzendorff. Agreeing with all of these in some things, he resembles Dr. Crisp most in unguardedness of expression, in ambiguity of argument ...¹²

There is no evidence that Campbell was in fact familiar with any of these divines, except Sandeman, but the accusation of Amyraldianism was always a useful ploy against those who were suspected of departing from Calvinistic orthodoxy on the extent of the atonement, whilst no great compliment was intended in bracketing Campbell with Crisp the antinomian, Sandeman the sectary, or Zinzendorff the Moravian. The writer goes on, however, to aver that Campbell most of all resembles James Fraser of Brea -

or possibly Thomas Mair, who may have been the real author of the controversial Treatise on Justifying Faith, attributed to Fraser. Fraser (or Mair) had held to a supralapsarian view of election and reprobation, but also to a universal atonement in which Christ dies as legal representative of elect and reprobate, albeit only for the purpose of bringing greater wrath on the latter for rejecting such a pointedly relevant atonement. (It is interesting that the author of the Instructor article should single out Fraser in this way; fairly substantial quotations from his Treatise on Justifying Faith were appended to Erskine's Introductory Essay to Extracts of Letters to a Christian Friend by a Lady (February 1830), by means of which Erskine sought to gain credence for his own synthesis of universal atonement and particular election).

In May 1828, McLeod Campbell and Thomas Chalmers met for the first time. Campbell travelled to Edinburgh especially to speak to Chalmers about the distinctive doctrines of assurance and unlimited atonement which he was now preaching. In fact, he also went to Edinburgh to confer with Edward Irving on the same subjects, so that his initial personal encounter with both men took place in the same location, at the same time, for the same reason. He records the matter thus:

I went to Edinburgh at that time to see Irving (and Dr. Chalmers also), in order to lay before them the conclusions at which I had arrived on the subject of Assurance of Faith, and the practical experience as a minister with which my arriving at these conclusions was connected ... I went in the hope that the grounds of my own convictions would commend themselves to them; and this latter form of my hope seemed to be realised as to both; though I cannot say that there was anything more as to either of them. But they both took the position of intending to weigh what I said; not - that which I had so much experience of then with other ministers -

of deciding at once that I was wrong, and setting themselves - some kindly, some impatiently - to put me right.¹³

The fact that Campbell mentions Irving first and encloses Chalmers' name in brackets is not due to any higher estimation of the former, but to the fact that Campbell was endeavouring to correct what he felt was a misapprehension on the part of Mrs. Oliphant in her Life of Irving as to his motives for visiting Irving. Mrs. Oliphant stated that Campbell visited Irving "to ask counsel and help in the midst of his hopes and difficulties"¹⁴; Campbell insists that his motive for visiting both Irving and Chalmers was rather to try to persuade them of the correctness of his peculiar views.

One could wish for more information as to Chalmers' reaction to Campbell's visit. All we know is, as Campbell says, that Chalmers did not condemn his views, but listened with an open mind, and deemed the grounds of Campbell's convictions (if not the convictions themselves) acceptable. Once more, therefore, Chalmers stood out against what was by then becoming the general and typical Evangelical response of negativity to the theology of Erskine and Campbell.

Edward Irving at this juncture was touring Scotland, preaching on the subject which had become dearest to him, the premillennial second advent of Christ, a subject exhaustively discussed at the annual Albury conference on prophecy from 1826 - 30: occasions which tended to be dominated by the flamboyant presence of Irving, although officially presided over by a rich, pious, eccentric Member of Parliament by the name of Henry Drummond. Edinburgh was Irving's venue in May. He here delivered twelve public lectures on the book of Revelation, commencing at 6.00 am each morning - a time which did not

deter multitudes from attending and even assembling in readiness at 5.00 am. Chalmers attended, and was not on the whole impressed by the apocalyptic declamations of his erstwhile assistant.

I have no hesitation in saying it is quite woeful [said Chalmers] . There is power and richness and gleams of exquisite beauty, but withal a mysticism and extreme allegorisation which I am sure must be pernicious to the general cause.¹⁵

Irving's Edinburgh lodgings were in Great King Street, in the home of one Mr. Bridges, and it was here that Campbell found him and conferred with him on the great matter of assurance through the universal death of the Saviour. Irving listened earnestly to Campbell's point of view, and at the end of the interview declared to him that "God may have sent me instruction by your hands".¹⁶ Mrs. Oliphant thinks that it was actually at this point that Irving himself embraced a belief in universal atonement.

It is evident that he [Irving] entered into it [Campbell's doctrine] heartily; and holding, as he himself held, that Christ's work was one which redeemed not only individual souls but the nature of man, no one could be more ready than he to rejoice in the fullest unconditional proclamation that Christ died for all.¹⁷

But this does not harmonise with Campbell's testimony, for he attributes Irving's conversion to universal atonement to a later conversation in London. However, Mrs. Oliphant is no doubt justified in her remarks on Irving's response to Campbell's person, if not his doctrine:

Mr. Campbell commended himself entirely to Irving's heart. He was too visibly a man

of God to leave any doubtfulness upon his immediate reception into the fervent brotherhood of that tender nature.¹⁸

A few weeks later, in June, Irving preached for his old college friend Robert Story in Rosneath on the western shore of the Gareloch, and then for Campbell in Row on the eastern shore. It was during his stay in Row that he met A.J. Scott - not for the first time, according to Mrs. Oliphant, but it was only now that the two men became friends. Being very favourably impressed with the young Church of Scotland licentiate, Irving engaged him to become his assistant minister in London. "I was much delighted with Campbell and Sandy Scott", Irving wrote to his wife Isabella.¹⁹ His testimony concerning Scott was glowing:

a young man so learned and accomplished in all kinds of discipline I have never met with, and as pious as he is learned, and of great, very great discernment in the truth, and faithfulness Godward and manward.²⁰

With the forging of the Campbell-Scott-Irving axis, and the meeting of Campbell with both Erskine and Chalmers, 1828 saw the completion of the basic network of relationships between those characters central to this thesis who took part in the Row controversy.

Campbell accompanied Irving back to London, since he had other business there, and preached for him there in his new Regent Square church on the 15th, 22nd and 29th June. According to Campbell, it was at this time that Irving was converted to a belief in universal atonement, in a conversation of which Campbell later spoke often.

We were speaking of a sense of sin, and Irving said, "I do not know how it is, but I see that the Reformers had a far deeper sense of sin than we have." I replied that I believed it was because they had a deeper sense of the love of God as embracing the sinner, and as what the Atonement reveals. I do not know what more I said in expanding this ... Irving listened to me with that earnest weighing attention which was characteristic of him. He then got up and paced back and forward for a good while, during which I was silent. At last he stopped and said, "I believe you are right, and that you were sent to show me this." To what extent his system was then modified I do not know ... But from that time he preached the Atonement as for all, and the faith of the love manifested in it as the great power to awaken the deep sense of sin, as well as to quicken love to Him who first loved us.²¹

There is one point of difficulty in this. Irving himself recounts what appears to be a somewhat different story in a letter to his wife Isabella dated 4th August 1828:

Our dear friend, Mr. Paget of Leicester, was in church all yesterday, and kindly came down to converse, during part of the interval. I wish you knew him. He is truly a divine - more of a divine than all my acquaintances ... He also, like Campbell and Erskine, sees Christ's death to be on account of the whole world, so as that he might be the Lord both of the election and the reprobation, and that it is the will of God to give eternal life by the Holy Ghost to whom it pleaseth Him. I first came to the conviction of that truth on that Saturday when, at Harrow, after breakfasting with a bishop and a vicar, I sat down to prepare a meal for my people. He thinks the Calvinistic scheme confines this matter by setting forth Christ as dying, instead of, whereas there is no stead in the matter, but on account of, for the sake of, to bring about reconciliation. He also thinks that the righteousness of Christ which is imputed

to us, is not the righteousness of the ten commandments, which He kept, and which is only a fleshly righteousness, but the righteousness into which He hath entered by the resurrection - that super-celestial glory whereof we now partake, being one with Him, and living a resurrection life. This I believe; and I take it to be a most important distinction indeed.²²

This quotation is significant in that it shows Irving's familiarity with both Erskine and Campbell as teachers of the doctrine of universal atonement. It also shows that by the time of Irving's writing this letter, he had indeed come to share this conviction. However, he says that he arrived at it on his own, "when, at Harrow, after breakfasting with a bishop and a vicar, I sat down to prepare a meal [i.e., a sermon] for my people." This clearly conflicts with Campbell's account, if we take Irving to mean that his belief in universal atonement was reached as thus described, privately. But the two accounts are susceptible of harmonisation. Irving may mean only that it was the purpose of Christ in dying for all ("so as that He might be the Lord both of the election and the reprobation") which he came to believe privately, rather than the bare concept of a universal reference in the atonement. This latter could still have been taught him previously by Campbell.

Irving's espousal of universal atonement and indeed universal pardon appeared in volume I of his Sermons and Lectures, published in November 1828. The volume was entitled The Doctrine of the Incarnation Opened in Six Sermons; it consisted of a series of expositions on the Trinity, originally preached before the opening of Irving's new church building in Regent Square in May 1827, but revised and expanded for the press in the light of attacks on his orthodoxy in regard to his views of Christ's human

nature. A sizable proportion of it is indeed given over to a defence of Irving's peculiar Christology, viz. that in the incarnation Christ assumed a fallen humanity. Section II of the third sermon, however, entitled The universal reconciliation wrought by His death and the particular election ministered by His life in glory, is a setting forth of the universality of the atonement in combination with a belief in unconditional personal election - the Amyraldian type of theology Irving had learnt from Campbell and Erskine. As the title intimates, Irving conceived that Christ died on earth for all, but intercedes in heaven only for the elect (a position recently taken in this country of Dr. R.T. Kendall of Westminster Chapel). The essence of Irving's doctrine is contained in the following quotation:

This is the distinction between the principle of reconciliation and the principle of election: that all which the Lord Jesus did up to the resurrection, He did for mankind in general; but that all He hath done since the resurrection He doth in order to make a difference, not to establish a common right, but to make the difference between the election and the reprobation; the election baptising with the Holy Ghost, the reprobation suffering to remain under the penalty, not indeed of a broken law which He hath removed from all alike, but under the penalty of a rejected gospel.²³

Later on we hear what Irving meant by the gospel:

Your sins are remitted, your peace is made: believe, be ye saved. Go home, and tell it to your children; gather your kinsfolk and tell it unto them: tell it in your villages and towns; pass the seas and tell it unto the nations. Let the wide world know it and the races of men believe it, that their sins are forgiven, their peace made,²⁴ God gracious, abundant in mercy and truth.

Plainly this is Erskine and Campbell's gospel of free universal pardon. Irving had learnt his lesson well. However, at this point in time - and indeed, as far as we know, to the day of his death, unlike Erskine and Campbell - Irving believed passionately in the Calvinistic doctrine of election, and gave it a considerably more prominent place in his system than either Erskine or Campbell did in theirs while they still held to it. As for "smooth sinful Arminianism"²⁵ and its doctrine of election conditioned on faith, Irving condemned it in the most unsparing terms:

To talk of conditional election is the most egregious folly, the most entire rejection of Christ, the most wilful insurrection against the Father ... Talk to me of receiving Christ and not believing in unconditional election! You know not what you say. Talk to me of living in doubt of this and yet living by faith! The thing is impossible ... I utterly repudiate all such damnable doctrine: and anathematise all the preachers of it as the defacers and defamers of God's grace and the enemies of the cross of Christ.²⁶

To return to Erskine: In July he wrote to Chalmers the letter about the Freeness with which we opened this section. According to Hanna, he spent part of the summer (perhaps all of it) with Campbell in Row, but we do not know when exactly this was, apart from the obvious inference that it was somewhere between mid-June and mid-September. A.J. Scott was also present and accompanied Erskine back to Linlathen. While Erskine and Scott were together, Erskine wrote a letter to cousin Rachel which contains his first recorded impression of Scott:

Young Scott, the son of Dr. Scott of Greenock, is with us. He is a highly gifted man. May the mighty God bless him, and strengthen him for the work that he may

be called to! He preached last night in Dundee. There was one thing which he said upon the universality of the love of God to sinners which I shall repeat to you. When God was manifested in Christ, in the man Christ Jesus, that man fulfilled the whole law, of which the second great division is, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. If there had been any single man upon earth whom He did not love as Himself, He would have been a breaker of the law. But He fulfilled the whole law, and loved every man, as He loved Himself - ay and more; and as He thus fulfilled the law, He said, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father;" that is to say, My love to men is the very image of my Father's love to them.²⁷

Two months later, Erskine commended Scott to Mrs. Montagu in the following terms:

The motive of my writing to you at this moment is to tell you that Mr. Scott, who I believe is acting as assistant to Mr. Irving at present, is a friend very dear to me. I have received something through him. He is a very able minister of the new testament. He does not frustrate the grace of God, and I think you might find him profitable to your soul. In some ways I don't know his equal ...²⁸

The first extract shows us how important the doctrine of the incarnation was becoming to Erskine as a means of expressing and undergirding his convictions about God's relationship to man. The argument he uses is indeed legitimate within the limits of Calvinism, so far as Erskine here takes it; the great Reformed divine Robert Dabney uses it to prove that whereas God is not committed to saving all men effectually, He does nonetheless possess sincere feelings of goodness and pity to them, regardless of their election or reprobation.²⁹ But the argument

cannot be pushed, as McLeod Campbell was to push it, into a proof that Christ in love died for all men absolutely, without violating the frontiers of Calvinism. From a Reformed perspective such a use of a sound doctrine is most unsound. For although the law of God does indeed require men to love their neighbour, it does not tell them to do so by trying to atone for their neighbour's sins. No man is summoned to do this by the law of love, and Christ's vicarious atonement forms no part of His human obedience to that law. The cross, so far from being the supreme act of humanist philanthropy on Christ's part, did not constitute part of His normal human obedience at all, but was a unique and inimitable act of the God-man freely agreed between Him and His Father in the intra-Trinitarian counsels from all eternity. We have no reason to believe, and good reason to disbelieve, that a mere creature can atone for another creature's sins; if so, Christ's atonement cannot be explained in terms of God's command that men should love each other. The cross transcends such finite levels. The person who atoned was not a human person.

A month after his letter to Mrs. Montagu, at the close of the year, Erskine's attitude in relation to the Row controversy had for some reason clearly and emphatically hardened, and we can at last see beginning to emerge that polarised, militantly antithetical stance which bedevilled both sides in the controversy. Erskine was no longer content to believe, and to publish in writing, his conviction that Christ's death revealed God's saving love to all men; he must now preach this doctrine by word of mouth as the very essence of the gospel, and regard all adversaries - that is, all orthodox Calvinists - as propagators of a false religion. This newly belligerent mentality comes across with incisive clarity in a letter written to cousin Rachel, dated 26th December 1828. Apparently Rachel Erskine had written to Thomas disapprov-

ing of his preaching activities on the ground of his being a layman. Erskine, somewhat hurt by this rebuke from his beloved cousin, replied with this unqualified apologia:

I do not think that you can see the importance of the universality of Christ's atonement, if you can disapprove of the proclamation of it, though by a layman. You have told me that you believe that "Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world," in the obvious sense of these words. You have told me that you believe that this is God's message to this world of prodigals, that this is the message which is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe it. Well, do you also know that this doctrine is looked on as a heresy by almost all the teachers of religion in this country, and that a directly opposite doctrine is preached? If you believe in the universality of the atonement, you must believe that the limitation of it is a falsification of the record which God has given concerning His Son.

I live in the conviction that the record is continually falsified in the ears of the people of this country by those whom they are taught to look up to for instruction, to the dishonour of God's grace, and to the injury of the souls of men. God's message to the world is not delivered whilst a limited atonement is preached; and so long as this erroneous interpretation of the message is preached from our orthodox pulpits, the people may have the Bible in their hands, but the unfaithful interpretation will be a veil on their hearts in the reading of it. There were many Bibles among the Jews when our Lord appeared amongst them, but the unfaithful interpretation put upon their contents by the scribes of the time blinded the people to the truth, and they rejected Him of whom Moses and the prophets wrote.—must know that it is most important that even when the people have the Bible in their hands, there should be some one near to say to them, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" I have known people

long possessed of the Bible, who never read it, partly because it was not pressed upon them; and I have known many who have long read the Bible without ever apprehending, even in theory, its most elementary truths, because they were accustomed to hear a false interpretation of them weekly from the pulpit. If ——'s arguments were good, there need be little anxiety to have a gospel ministry in a place well supplied with Bibles. I see people about me with Bibles in their houses and in their hands (and who think occasionally of religion too, some of them), to whom the message that God loves them is a perfect novelty even in sound. If I can do anything for any of these souls, these immortals, as an instrument in God's hands, am I to hesitate because I am classed in the world's list under one denomination of persons rather than another?³⁰

What Erskine's new evangelistic activities consisted in is uncertain. We know that he had been in the habit of delivering "lectures" (in effect, sermons) every Thursday evening in Linlathen House since at least November 1825 - when he was actually in Scotland, of course; and many from outside Erskine's immediate family circle attended the daily morning and evening domestic services in which the laird practised the homiletic art.³¹ If such activities were already normal for Erskine, why did cousin Rachel only now bring herself to complain, especially since she agreed with the doctrines which Erskine was preaching? It would seem that Erskine had widened the scope of his preaching in some fashion - perhaps by holding extraordinary meetings in locations other than Linlathen, or by occupying the pulpit of his Broughty-Ferry chapel. At any rate, he was actively involved in spreading the "Row heresy" by word of mouth, by public preaching, and to this Rachel took exception since he was a layman. Erskine therefore defended himself on the basis that the truth he was preaching was so vitally

important that his own lack of clerical status paled into insignificance before the urgent necessity of proclaiming God's message to needy souls.

The attitude exhibited by Erskine in this letter towards his Calvinistic opponents is striking. The basic issue between them was simple enough: was it love for all men or love for the elect which principally motivated Jesus Christ to die on the cross? Did He bear the sins even of those who will be lost, or only those of His own people? Erskine, holding the former, considered the latter "a falsification of the record which God has given concerning His Son". Those who preached limited atonement did so "to the dishonour of God's grace, and to the injury of the souls of men". They are compared with the scribes of Christ's own day, whose "unfaithful interpretation" of the Old Testament "blinded the people to the truth, and they rejected Him of whom Moses and the prophets wrote". The descriptive phrases are piled up: "falsification of the record", "erroneous interpretation", "unfaithful interpretation", "false interpretation". In a nutshell: "God's message to the world is not delivered whilst a limited atonement is preached."

In July 1828, at the start of this section, we saw Erskine conceding that the religious teachers of his native land who disagreed with the Freeness could be "very right" as Christians even though wrong as theologians. By December 1828, they were the modern day scribes and pharisees, causing men to reject the truth of Christ by their false, erroneous, unfaithful interpretation of God's record concerning His Son. One doubts whether such people could honestly or seriously be described as being "very right" as Christians, if words are to be meaningful. Erskine's attitude had manifestly shifted. No longer was it a case of genuinely Christian men who happened not to agree with Erskine of Linlathen's views; it was

now a case of Calvinistic scribes failing to deliver God's message to the world, dishonouring His grace, injuring men's souls, blinding them to the true gospel. This fearful polarisation was to increase still further and receive verbal expressions far more pungent and vituperative. Erskine had truly commenced his career as a bellicose crusader for the "Row heresy", whose forceful language among the friends of that movement was equalled (perhaps exceeded) only by the stormy rhetoric of Edward Irving.

(ii) Gathering pace: the Christology of Irving

The opening of 1829 furnishes us with the first evidence we possess of discontent with McLeod Campbell's preaching burgeoning into positive agitation against him on the part of some of his parishioners. Campbell reacted somewhat pessimistically to this, in a letter to his sister dated January 14th:

I have no wish whatever to leave the Church of Scotland: - not for the sake of the living which is now coming to me as a member of it; - if I saw it God's will that I should leave it I could have no hesitation in going out, trusting all to Him; - but because I honestly feel that there is no body calling itself Christian to which I could join myself in preference.¹

It appears that a number of disaffected individuals - three or four, according to Campbell - had drawn up a petition against their minister and presented it to his presbytery (Dunbarton). He mentions this in another letter to his sister:

My mind is at present somewhat burdened about the petition to the Presbytery, but as, through grace, I am conscious of the single and unmingled desire to act as may be most for the glory of the truth, I can cast my burden on the Lord.²

The affair dragged on for some months, and provoked a most revealing utterance from Campbell in the following letter, again to his sister, dated 6th March. Here we catch a glimpse of how Campbell himself viewed the Row controversy both in its doctrinal and practical bearings:

I agree with you in thinking my teaching more according to the standards than that of those who differ with me. I agree also with you in saying that of many of my brethren it is true that we divide more in the personal application of what we preach than in the doctrinal statement. As to the extent to which there is anything new in my views, I think I have a distinct conception of it, and when I go back to the writings of Luther and Calvin, I find it not great ... I know that, as you say, I might publish - yea, might preach - the truth without challenge if I avoided two things: innovations in language, such as saying that all are pardoned, and personal interrogations, such as, Are you born again? Do you know yourself to be a child of God? But it would pass without challenge only because I would not be understood; because, through false associations formed with right words, I might be saying the right thing and yet convey a false meaning.³

There are several points which demand attention here. Firstly, Campbell admits that it is his twin emphases on universal pardon and assurance of salvation which are causing all the trouble. It is interesting that he refers to the former as an example of his "innovation in language". Does he mean that he is not an innovator

in doctrine as such, but only in the linguistic articulation of doctrine? This would seem to be implied by his assertion that "my teaching is more according to the standards [i.e., the Westminster Confession] than that of those who differ from me", and that "we divide more in the personal application of what we preach than in the doctrinal statement". He here almost reduces the whole controversy to a matter of words rather than substance, of differing articulations of the theology of the Westminster Confession rather than real theological dissension.

If this is what Campbell did mean, he had certainly changed his mind by September, for he then preached a sermon in which he attacked five-point Calvinism as "man's religion", a "selfish religion", as opposed to the true gospel, "the religion of God", which he himself was proclaiming.⁴ Further, he wrote to his father in January 1830:

Again and again it has been suggested to me that surely the difference [between Campbell and his opponents] is more verbal than real; and if there were any truth in this, it would be a painful consideration indeed, that upon a verbal difference, even although right in my choice of words, I should so embroil the church. But oh! It is not verbal, but real and most fundamental, and most extensive, not as to one, but as to all points.⁵

We may be seeing here the same sort of shift in attitude as we noted in the previous section with regard to Erskine.

It is a fascinating fact that Campbell himself in the spring of 1828 had condemned the phrase "universal pardon" as one calculated to mislead. His clerical friend, Story of Rosneath, had been undergoing the same theol-

ogical convulsions as Campbell during a long therapeutic vacation in the south of England, and he had written to Campbell avowing his new-found belief in universal forgiveness through the death of the Saviour. He wished Campbell to read out to his (Story's) congregation a statement on the subject which he had drawn up. But Campbell demurred:

when I proceed to ask you to reconsider the form of expression which you select as that which you say you shall employ, "Believe that your sins are forgiven," I am aware that I shall seem to recall statements you have heard me make on the subject, for I think I have used the same or nearly the same words. Yet it is not that my views are in the least changed, nor so far as I can see different from yours; but that this expression, besides being I think without apostolic sanction, is calculated to convey something else than the truth ... Now, dearest, do you believe that the sins of men are forgiven before they believe - and this is a fact concerning every man whom you address, although he should never believe? If so, so far as I yet see, I could not go along with you. I believe that Christ has suffered for all, and that therefore each has forgiveness in Christ in the same sense that he has eternal life in Christ, and this, whether he believes or not. But out of Christ there is neither life nor forgiveness ... The facts that are prior to belief, true, and which are properly the objects of belief, are that Christ died for the sins of every man, and that therefore every man has access to God through Him; coming in which way a man comes sinless, and not only sinless but clothed with the righteousness of God. The facts that emerge or arise, or become existences in believing, are that the soul becomes alive in Christ, and is pardoned and justified. I therefore do not say "believe that you are pardoned or justified," any more than "believe that you are alive to God," because these are not yet facts. But I say, "believe that Christ died for your sins and rose again for your justification, and that in Him you have pardon and righteousness."⁶

What Campbell meant was that all sinners were called upon by the gospel to believe that Christ died for them, but that only then, in the act of so believing, did they become pardoned and justified. Story took this reproof to heart and altered his language accordingly. But for some reason Campbell himself soon reverted to the obnoxious terminology of universal pardon, and persisted in it to the bitter end - in spite of Story's strong remonstrances. As Story's son, the author of Story's biography, remarks:

It is singular to observe that in regard to this, Mr. Campbell and he [Story] should have changed places; he, latterly, finding the same fault with Mr. C.'s language, that Mr. C., at the time of the Pastoral Address, had found with his.⁷

The question of the theological linguistics of "universal pardon" is one to which we shall return. Suffice it for the moment to say that when Campbell affirmed his belief that all were pardoned, he had a peculiar definition of "pardon", and that on this point his quarrel with his opponents does seem to have been something of a semantic affair.

The second issue raised in Campbell's letter to his sister is the doctrine of assurance. It is clear that he was demanding of his parishioners a positive response to his "personal interrogations" - "Are you born again? Do you know yourself to be a child of God?" Assurance of salvation was of the essence of faith. This, incidentally, differs from Erskine's account of assurance in his letter to Mrs. Montagu in July 1826, in which he had objected to the "personal interrogations" of César Malan on the grounds that assurance of pardon and assurance of salva-

tion were separate in nature.

I believe that I have the first, viz.,
pardon, for I read that the blood of Christ
cleanseth from all sin; but I cannot
believe that I have salvation when I feel
the evil heart of unbelief opposing the will
of God within me.⁸

The possibilities of confusion which entered into this matter in the Row controversy were all too predictable. It is at least clear that Campbell's parishioners (or some of them) objected to his interrogations, although not for the same reason that Erskine objected to Malan's. We should also bear in mind that the debate stirred up by Malan in Scotland over the question of assurance was still alive at this time; no fewer than ten letters covering seventy-five pages are given over to it in the Edinburgh Christian Instructor between October 1828 and February 1830, arguing both for and against Malan's view (four of the letters are pro-Malan, five against, and one apparently neutral). It is not too fanciful to conclude that this debate heightened sensitivity to the issue and laid Campbell open to the wrath of Malan's many adversaries.

The agitation against Campbell on this occasion came to nothing. His supporters organised a counter-petition against the complaint to presbytery, and it was "signed by all the most respectable people in the parish"; his opponents were embarrassed when one of their number was found to be in a state of excommunication from the Kirk and had his name struck off the petition of complaint, which was ultimately withdrawn.⁹ Campbell wrote later that year that, "At present opposition seems very much subdued", although complaining in the same breath that "very few are receiving 'with cordial faith the tidings

which we bring'".¹⁰ The minister of Row was safe for the time being; but the danger signals were clearly there, and the menacing episode of January to March proved a foreshadowing of the more concerted agitation which was to begin in March 1830.

Erskine at this juncture was in Linlathen, meditating on the doctrine of election. We recall the difficulties he had in offering a clear and coherent account of how this doctrine fitted into his scheme of universal grace in the Freeness. On 23rd January he decided to air his latest views by writing two letters dealing with the subject, one to Mr. and Mrs. Money (Mr. Money was British Consul-General at Venice), the other to Thomas Matthews, pastor of an Independent church in Hamburg. He had met both parties during his continental excursions. The heart of his concern is to be found in his letter to Matthews:

The election is God's provision that the work of Christ shall not be without fruit in consequence of man's unbelief. When the Saviour complains, "I have spent my strength for nought and in vain," the Father assures Him that He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied. But the love of God in the gospel of Christ is quite distinct in the Bible from the doctrine of election; and it must be so, in order to be a ground of confidence, for no man can read in the Bible that he is elected; and thus if the atonement ran in the channel of election no man could, in the Bible, read his interest in the atonement. But every man who knows himself to be one of the whole world reads in the Bible his own interest in that propitiation which was made for the whole world. Any confidence he may have in his election must arise from his possessing certain marks, i.e. it must arise from something within himself: "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, that I have faith," etc. Whereas the confidence that he has in the atonement is a confidence in the truth of God's testimony to the world

concerning His Son.¹¹

Or, as he put it in his epistle to the Moneys:

Why then does one man believe and another not? Faith is the operation of the electing grace of God. No man yields to the truth until he is compelled by this electing grace of God. This is the proper place for election; faith is given through the channel of election. But the atonement is for all, and the invitation and command to believe in and to enjoy it is for all.¹²

For the sake of convenience we will also cite at this point a passage from a letter to Erskine's French friend, Madame de Stael, dated 4th September 1829 and written from Edinburgh, since here too he touches on the matter of election, and we will thus be able to consider together all three of his utterances for 1829:

Election does not consist in God's making the light of His love to shine upon one and not upon another, for He loves all, and gave Christ as a ransom for all. It consists in this, that when all refused to open their eyes God forces open the eyes of some, and leaves others to their own obstinacy.¹³

Logical and theological difficulties of cyclopean proportions are thrown up by the Amyraldian construction evident in these passages. In particular, Erskine does not offer any account of what on his telling is the seeming ineffectiveness of Christ's atoning death. For the paradox of Erskine's position is that he wishes to open up the blessings of Christ's death in a global direction, yet succeeds in doing almost the reverse. According

to Erskine, the incarnate Son of God sacrifices Himself as the Redeemer of sinners, but the result is universal unbelief, which God has to step in to remedy by "forcing" men's eyes open, "compelling" them to believe. The departure from orthodox Calvinistic thought on the atonement here is substantial. According to Reformed theology, Christ died in order actually and definitely to save men from their sins, to liberate them, to bring them effectually to God. The atonement in itself secures that the elect will repent and believe, because its design is to equip Christ as a perfect and omniscient Saviour who by His Spirit can and will communicate to His people the benefits of His atoning sacrifice. Erskine by contrast has postulated an atonement which secures nothing, as far as the actual salvation of sinners is concerned, and whose deficiency God has to make up by a fresh and independent initiative. This does not seem to be a coherent position, and Erskine was soon to abandon it. Having said this, however, the truly significant and astonishing thing is surely that Erskine clung on to the doctrine of unconditional personal election for as long as he did. This, as I previously suggested, may well have been due to a feeling on Erskine's part that this truth was an immediate utterance of his religious consciousness. This is borne out by the fact that he brings election forward as the answer to the experimental question, "Why does one man believe and another not?" Erskine had to convince himself that he had been misinterpreting his own spiritual experience before he could safely abandon this hallowed Calvinistic teaching.

In March Erskine stayed with Charles and Christian Stirling at Cadder, enjoying John Keble's collection of religious poems entitled The Christian Year, first published in 1827. This volume had many admirers in its day, among them Thomas Chalmers who referred to it

as

a work of exquisite beauty and most worthy of your perusal, nay of your daily companionship, if you have not yet admitted it into your cabinet.¹⁴

Erskine's reaction was similar:

I have Keble lying open before me. The hymns for the holy week are beautiful : Monday is exquisite. I think that I like it best of them all. The use made of Andromache's farewell [from the Iliad, book 6, lines 406ff.] is quite filling to the heart, and the theology of the fourth stanza, "Thou art as much His care," etc., is worthy, in my mind, the whole Shorter and Longer Catechisms together.¹⁵

The stanza in question runs thus:

Thou art as much His care, as if beside
Nor man nor angel lived in Heaven or earth:
Thus sunbeams pour alike their glorious tide
To light up worlds, or wake an insect's mirth:
They shine and shine with unexhausted store -
Thou art thy Saviour's darling - seek no more.¹⁶

The theology of this stanza was worth "the whole Shorter and Longer Catechisms together", because of its endearing depiction of God's love, which Erskine felt was lacking in the Westminster standards.

The popularity of the Christian Year in its day is mostly a mystery to modern readers. In Geoffrey Faber's words:

Few, if any, modern critics would maintain

that The Christian Year is good poetry. Fewer still, perhaps, would maintain that it is good religious poetry.¹⁷

It is, however, possible to discern why Erskine should have found it so attractive. Its author Keble was, in R.W. Church's description,

steeped in all that is noblest and tenderest and most beautiful in Greek and Roman literature, with the keenest sympathy with that new school of poetry which, with Wordsworth as its representative, was searching out the deeper relations between nature and the human soul ...¹⁸

The description sounds familiar. The same blend of Classicism and Romanticism stamped Erskine's mind. He found a kindred spirit breathing in Keble's poems.

In May Erskine was mediating again on the psychology of faith and sanctification. He had experienced no change of view on this score since the writing of Salvation in 1816, and in a letter to Rachel Erskine he went over the old territory once again.

... what is it that enters into our hearts when we believe anything? Is it not the thing that we believe? Thus some friend of yours does you an unkindness which you know nothing of. Whilst you are ignorant of it, it does not enter into your mind, and of course does not affect you in any way. I hear of it and tell you ... I bring you irresistible evidence - you believe it, it enters and makes you miserable. So when a history of love is told, what is it that enters, when it is believed, but the love? It is thus in man's dealings with man; and though different in degree, and even in kind, yet in many respects it is thus also in our dealings with God. "God so loved the

world," etc. God's love is the only spiritual life - the only sap of the universal vine, and it can only enter, as it cannot but enter, by being believed.¹⁹

Belief of the truth, in and of itself, necessarily produces spiritual life and sanctification.

July saw Erskine back at the Gareloch, staying with McLeod Campbell in Row cottage. This was his second visit to the district. One wonders how the cultivated laird reacted to the atmosphere of strong religious emotion which by now had gripped the multitude of Campbell's admirers, labelled by some as "Rowites". According to a contemporary, the Rowites referred to Row and Rosneath as "Goshen" - after the one place in Egypt exempted from the ten plagues because the Israelites dwelt there.²⁰ Women tended to predominate the Rowites' number, much to this contemporary's offence; he spoke of

those over-much-righteous ladies, who, in the bustle of their little spirits, have undertaken to explain what they do not comprehend, and that in a manner destructive to female modesty, and calculated rather to strengthen prejudice, than to open the heart to religious instruction.¹⁷

Among other things, the Rowites would join hands during psalm-singing and move them up and down to beat time to the music; the ladies would groan and ejaculate pious phrases during prayer meetings, and all would greet one another with a "holy kiss".² Such behaviour was perceived by many as an outrage on traditional Scottish decorum in worship.

Erskine's second trip to Row, however, is significant not

so much because of what we know of the intercourse between Erskine and Campbell, or Erskine's response to Rowite enthusiasm - for of this we know nothing - but because of another letter to Rachel Erskine which her cousin penned while staying on the shores of the Gareloch. This epistle contains the following extremely important paragraph:

Christ was the New Head of the human nature. Now, my beloved friend, attend. Suppose we were in a churchyard, and saw the earth over the grave, where we had seen a human body interred some time before, begin to move, and at last we saw the head of that human body in perfect life elevating itself above the ground, - if astonishment would allow us to reason, should we not feel assured that the rest of the members would soon follow the head, - should we not know that there was life in the body again because there was life in the head? Christ is the second Adam, the real unfigurative Head of the human body. He had suffered death as a partaker of that tainted life which was under the curse; and then He rose again with a new life infused into Him ... In the death of Christ the old life was exhausted, and in the resurrection the new life was infused.²³

This is unmistakably the language of Edward Irving's Christology. By July 1829, therefore, Erskine had evidently adopted this Christology as his own belief, and it was to remain so for the rest of his life.

The likely sources of Erskine's new Christology are two: William Law and Edward Irving himself. Law appears to have held that Christ assumed a fallen human nature in the incarnation, as we noted in chapter II, section (x); and given Erskine's enthusiastic response to Law, we cannot rule out the possibility that Law's influence is to be seen here. However, it does seem more probable that

Erskine had been reading Irving's Doctrine of the Incarnation Opened, or possibly the magazine The Morning Watch, first published in early 1829, in which Irving expounded his Christology, and had derived his new beliefs directly from the great Annan orator. Erskine no doubt found the doctrine attractive from the standpoint of his tendency to merge the natural and the supernatural. If Christ Himself had a fallen nature, the supernatural Saviour of sinners was brought so much closer to fallen men, and men in their natural fallenness became more like Him.

Erskine, however, seems not to have known Irving very intimately at a personal level - certainly not as well as Irving was known by Story, Scott or Chalmers, or even McLeod Campbell. He acknowledged this later in life in regard to the biography of Irving which Mrs. Oliphant was planning:

I knew Irving a little, but not enough to be able to give much help towards such a work as Mrs. Oliphant is undertaking ... Carlyle and Scott knew him well, and have very living portraits of him in their own hearts, Scott cannot speak of him without becoming Irving in voice and manner, even in countenance.²⁴

Nevertheless, Erskine ironically endorsed Irving's Christology far more heartily than the others did; Campbell and Scott endorsed it only temperately, while Chalmers and Story never endorsed it at all.²⁵

Since Erskine remained a lifelong believer in Irving's Christology and expounded it with great zeal in The Brazen Serpent (1831), it is appropriate to indulge in a lengthy pause to examine just what Irving did believe on this score.

In essence, Irving's belief was that the human nature assumed by the Logos in the incarnation was the same in all respects as that of other men since the fall, including innate sinful propensities. However, the human soul of Christ was perfectly indwelt by the Holy Spirit from the moment of conception, and the Spirit counteracted the sinful tendencies of Christ's assumed humanity, empowering Him to live a spotlessly holy life. That, at least, is what Irving seems to have taught, although the present writer must candidly confess to a feeling of frustration at Irving's breath-takingly turgid attempts to articulate what he meant when he said that Christ's human nature was fallen.

To expand a little: Irving appears to have affirmed that in His temptations Christ experienced internal moral conflict, that is, struggle against temptations which arose from within His fallen nature. Commenting, for instance, on Paul's graphic description of his battle against his own sinful nature in ROM. 7:14 - 25, he said:

Christ could always say with Paul, "Yet not I, but sin that dwelleth in me" ... Christ experienced everything the same as Paul did, except the "captivity".²⁶

He asserted that Christ's humanity was "a created substance, in which sin and Satan had power", and that "Christ's flesh was ... obnoxious to Satan's power as mine is ... Christ's flesh was as mine is, liable to all temptation."²⁷ Again:

His flesh was of that mortal and corruptible kind which is liable to all forms of evil suggestion and temptation through its participation in a fallen nature and a fallen world.²⁸

Or again, he affirmed

the consubstantiality of Christ's manhood with our manhood as to its nature, as to its temptations, as to its native inclinations ...²⁹

It was only at the resurrection that Christ's human nature was lifted above the fall: "the Holy Ghost did not till then expel Satan out of that region".³⁰

But all these assertions raised immense theological problems, as Irving's opponents were swift to point out. If Christ was liable to all our temptations, and if His human experience was identical with ours as to its "native inclinations" and "liability to all forms of evil suggestion", it inevitably follows that Christ must have felt sinful desires - must have been assailed by that category of temptation which appeals to a pre-existing sinful affection in the heart of the tempted, into which class a large number of our own temptations fall (e.g. temptations which appeal to our greed, lust or pride). But if so, Christ was surely a sinner, since to have sinful desires is ipso facto to be in a state of sin, whether one can keep those desires from being executed or not. This is surely Christ's point in the sermon on the mount, where He says that lustful desire, apart from any ensuing deed, is adultery in God's sight (MATT. 5:27, 28).

Irving had two ways of avoiding this disastrous conclusion. On the one hand, he brought into play the classic theological distinction between "nature" and "person", and argued that moral responsibility attached only to the latter. Distinguishing between "sin in a nature" and "sin in a person", he defined the former as a "dis-

position" leading the person away from righteousness, and the latter as the person's yielding to and obeying this disposition. Thus:

we can assert the sinfulness of the whole, the complete, the perfect human nature which He took, without in the least implicating Him [the Divine Person] with sin ...³²

Christ was a sinless Divine Person with a sinful human nature, i.e. a nature stamped with the disposition to sin. But since moral responsibility attaches to persons, not natures, it followed that the mere disposition to sin was not itself sin; only the person's consent to that disposition, Irving argued, constituted sin. Irving here departed radically from the theology of the Reformation, which has historically maintained that the inclination to sin is in itself and as such sinful. Irving's position is akin to that of Roman Catholicism, which denies "concupiscence" to be of the essence of sin.³³

On the other hand, and in apparent contradiction to all this, Irving seems at times to have taught that Christ did not possess any inclinations to sin. When Christ was tempted, Irving said, there was in Him

no response, no inclination, but abhorrence and detestation of the deepest powerfulllest kind ... There was no concupiscence, no thought or meditation of evil, no indwelling of lust, no abiding of anger or malice or hatred; but all was holy, lovely, beautiful and perfect, as the will of God ...³⁴

He also variously avowed that Christ's human nature "never originated an evil suggestion",³⁵ and that

whenever I attribute sinful properties and dispositions and inclinations to our Lord's

human nature, I am speaking of it considered as apart from Him, in itself.³⁶

But if this was the case with Christ's human nature - if by virtue of the hypostatic union Christ's human nature, although sinful in itself, "apart from Him", was not so in conjunction with Him - it follows that Christ was not tempted in just the same way that we are, since He must have been free from that experience of temptation which appeals to existing sinful inclinations. This indeed is the traditional catholic doctrine, and may well be implied in HEB. 4:15, that Christ was "tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" - without the sort of temptations to which only the sinful are liable.³⁷ Irving's Christology would in that case lose its distinctive features and collapse back into orthodoxy; there would be no meaningful basis left on which to call Christ's humanity fallen or sinful.

(For a discussion of the historical pedigree of Irving's Christology, see Appendix V).

I think that it is possible deeply to sympathise with Irving's desire to bring out the true humanity of the incarnate Logos, His genuine experience of a human life in utter dependence on His Father, His unmitigated openness to pain, emotion and moral conflict with temptation. But at the same time one must, I think, acknowledge that the way in which Irving sought to do this was thoroughly confused and ambiguous, often involving the use of a strain of language which took him beyond the limits of catholic Christological reflection on the sinlessness of the Saviour. Irving's friend and mentor, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, said some perceptive things in this regard. He too felt that the reality of Christ's humanity was not properly apprec-

iated in his day:

according to the present almost universal Habit of Thought among the orthodox Churches, Jesus, the Exemplar of Humanity, the First-fruits of the Resurrection, the Captain of our Salvation, is well nigh lost - overpowered in the splendours of the only begotten and co-eternal Word that was incarnate in Jesus.³⁸

But Coleridge had to confess the ultimate failure of "poor Irving"³⁹ to contribute anything helpful on this score:

Irving's expressions upon this subject are ill-judged, inconvenient, in bad taste, and in terms false: nevertheless, his apparent meaning, such as it is, is orthodox. Christ's body - as mere body, or rather carcass ... was no more capable of sin or righteousness than mine or yours; that His humanity had a capacity of sin, follows from its own essence. He was of like passions as we, and was tempted. How could He be tempted, if He had no formal capacity of being seduced? It is Irving's error to use declamation, high and passionate rhetoric, not introduced and pioneered by calm and clear logic, which is ... like knocking a nail into a board, without wimbling a hole for it, and which then either does not enter, or turns crooked, or splits the wood it pierces.⁴⁰

Irving's "apparent meaning" was orthodox, to insist that the Church take seriously the Saviour's human experience of temptation. But his lack of intellectual and linguistic clarity shipwrecked his endeavour and led only to confusion, controversy and bitterness. This was Irving's tragedy.

By 1829, when Erskine adopted it, Irving's Christology was being publicly attacked as heresy. It had been brought to the attention of the religious public in late

1827 by the Anglican clergyman Henry Cole, who had been shocked to hear Irving preach his doctrine of Christ's fallen humanity from the pulpit of Regent Square church. In May 1829, while Irving was once more lecturing in Edinburgh on the Apocalypse, James Haldane went into print against him with his Refutation of the Heretical Doctrine Promulgated by the Rev. Edward Irving respecting the Person and Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. Irving claimed of this lengthy pamphlet that "there is no strength in it",⁴¹ but Haldane made some telling points. He particularly spotlighted Irving's toned-down concept of sin. According to Irving, feeling attracted to evil was not itself evil; but,

The slightest bias to evil is inconsistent with what the law requires, that we love God with all our hearts, and all our might.⁴²

Here was Irving's dilemma : either Christ felt a proclivity to sin in His temptations, in which case He was Himself sinful and in need of a Saviour; or He did not, in which case His native inclinations and temptations were not identical with ours, and fallenness became a needless and gratuitous predication of His humanity. Irving never really faced up to or answered this, except insofar as he tried to dilute the definition of sin.

The redoubtable Dr. Andrew Thomson now also entered the lists against both Irving and McLeod Campbell in a series of notes to his Sermons on Various Subjects. He did not name either party, but it was manifestly obvious whose views he was attacking. With regard to Irving's Christology, Thomson uttered what was probably the sanest word spoken in that whole murky controversy:

It will not do to say ... that the human

nature which the Son of God took upon Him was originally sinful flesh; but that it was purified from its sinfulness before it became a part of Christ Jesus, as God and Man in one person ... For if the human nature of Christ was at first fallen or sinful, but purified from sin before it became a constituent part of His person as God-Man, then from the moment that he became the person who was to take away our guilt by the sacrifice of Himself, His human nature was not fallen or sinful, but totally free from all the moral evil introduced by the fall, and so there is no room left for the dispute which has been engendered.⁴³

Thomson was quite willing to admit that the Holy Spirit sanctified Christ's human nature, but this must have happened either before that nature's personal assumption or in the very act of assumption. Consequently, as soon as the human nature "became a constituent part of His person as God-Man", it was sinless. If it was sinful after that, Christ was a sinner. Thomson, incidentally, also attacked Irving's premillennialism, but that falls outside our limited scope.

The attack on McLeod Campbell came in the form of an eight page note on the doctrine of assurance. Here Thomson restated the traditional view that assurance of salvation

is an inference from saving faith, and not to be identified with saving faith itself. I am told in Scripture, that whosoever believeth in the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved; but I am not told in Scripture - it is no part of revelation, that I am to be saved.⁴⁴

The proof that faith is genuine, Thomson argued, involves the moral evidence of its effects in the life of the professing believer. This, of course, was Campbell's "long

established delusion as to evidences".⁴⁵

Irving visited Rosneath and Row in the summer of 1829, and probably enjoyed the company of Erskine as well as Campbell and Story. Erskine's letter to cousin Rachel in which he first indicates his adherence to the Irvingite Christology was written at this time. He also wrote a letter to an unnamed "clerical friend" which also presents some interesting features. It contains various statements of the doctrine of universal atonement, such as:

How little is Paul's creed understood: "I live by the faith of the Son of God." And what faith is that? "Who loved me, and gave Himself for me." Paul did not learn this after he was a Christian; he became a Christian by believing it, and no man becomes a Christian in any other way. You know this truth for yourself ... Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and He is God's gift of love to the world.⁴⁶

The stakes are being raised; no-one becomes a Christian at all except by believing that God loves him and Christ died for him, i.e. bore his sins. More important, however, is Erskine's unsparing assault on the Evangelicalism of his native land. The true gospel, Erskine affirms, "will either draw men to God or it will excite the hatred of the natural man." Yet he does not see this happening in Scotland.

.... that which is generally preached in this country as the gospel neither gives life nor excites hatred; on the contrary, it gives men a vague and deadening hope of safety, which is quite agreeable to the carnal mind. The gospel of the present day substitutes the seriousness of man for the grace of God. If a man has serious thoughts about God and his own soul, he is both by himself

and his friends thought to be in a safe state, although he knows nothing of that record which God hath sent to every man, viz., that God hath given him eternal life in His Son. Until men know that their sins are forgiven them, they are not Christians - they have no life in them ...⁴⁷

In contrast to this, Erskine exhorts his friend to come to the shores of the Gareloch and hear the true and living preaching of McLeod Campbell.

The preaching here is the application of our Lord's word, "It is finished," to the hearts and consciences of men, and God gives life through the Word. There is either life or hatred. It is not man's word that I ask you to listen to. I ask you to come, that you may hear a word from God which you may speak again to others.⁴⁸

The polarised, antithetical mentality which had by now mastered Erskine's mind stands out in this letter in all its unblushing assertiveness. The pseudo-gospel of Scottish Calvinistic Evangelicalism, "man's word", must give place to God's life-giving Word from the lips of Campbell of Row - the good news of universal divine love, universal atonement, universal forgiveness. Erskine's commitment to Campbell, and antagonism to Campbell's opponents, were thorough and complete.

Similar sentiments regarding the gospel according to McLeod Campbell occur in the remaining three letters penned by Erskine in 1829, and it would be monotonous to quote from them extensively. We can perhaps note the following as a typical utterance:

Unless all were loved the world could not be charged with the sin of unbelief, for if there existed a man for whom Christ did

not die, there could be no sin in that man disbelieving it. If he did believe that Christ died for him, when He did not, he would be believing in a lie.⁴⁹

This was and is a traditional objection to limited atonement on the part of believers in universal atonement. A Calvinistic response would, I think, be something like this: it all depends on what one means by Christ dying "for" the unbeliever. In one very important sense, the unbeliever is called upon by the gospel to believe that Christ died for him. It was part of Christ's intention in dying that He should offer Himself as Saviour to this unbeliever through the preaching of the gospel. The unbeliever must believe this - must believe that Christ died in order to offer Himself as Saviour to all those whom (in the providence of God) the gospel addresses. God's intention in the free offer of the gospel cannot be divorced from His intention in the death of Christ; if God in His providential government of the world intends that His Son shall be set forth as Saviour to all who hear the gospel, this intention can scarcely be separated from the divine intention in the mission of Christ to become a Saviour through His atoning death. The unbeliever is therefore called upon to believe that Christ's death was intended to effect the free offer of salvation to him in particular. In that sense, which is not slight or trivial, Christ died for the unbeliever, whether he be elect or not. However, if by Christ dying "for" sinners is meant His dying with the intention of effectually saving them, this would apply in Calvinistic thought only to the elect, and the unbeliever would not be called upon to believe that Christ died for him in this sense. Erskine evinces no appreciation of these distinctions. Neither, unfortunately, have too many Calvinists, whose narrow insistence on the purely limited aspect of the

atonement has probably been partly responsible for the narrow insistence of men like Erskine on its general or universal reference.

In October, Erskine wrote another epistle to Thomas Chalmers in which he endeavoured to quieten Chalmers' misgivings about the Row theology. Chalmers may have been sympathetic, but we have seen that he drew the line at universal pardon, fearing that it would lead eventually to a denial of the reality of hell. Erskine as yet was not ready to take his theology to that conclusion, although he was soon to do so, and he did not accept Chalmers' criticisms. In the following lengthy passage he offers an explanation of how universal pardon is consistent with a belief in future judgment for unbelievers:

You [Chalmers] object to all this [universal pardon] by asking me, "Where is the pardon if the man continues an unbeliever to the end?" Now, my dear and much respected friend, I think that I distinctly see the answer to this in the Word of God, and I pray God that He may cause you to see it also. It is this. The penalty pronounced against Adam's race at the fall was death, or the separation of the soul and body. There is no more said of it in the Bible. The death temporal, spiritual, and eternal is an invention of man; death spiritual is just sin, for it is the shutting out of God from the heart, who is the only true life, and therefore it is an improper to say that death spiritual is the punishment of sin, as to say that sin is the punishment of sin. Under the Adamic dispensation there is no other punishment mentioned in the Bible than death. Whilst therefore this penalty of the broken law lay upon man, no human being could rise again - that penalty must have lain upon him like a weight keeping him in his grave, and the rising of any human being is a proof of the removal of the penalty in regard to him. But we are informed that every human being is to rise again, unbelievers as well as believers; that is to say, all men are to be delivered from this penalty or curse of the broken law.

How is this? "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, having been made a curse for us," Gal. iii. 13. "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive," Cor. XV. 22. "Therefore as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men to justification of life," Rom. V. 18. "And for this cause He is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance," Heb. IX. 15. All are redeemed from the penalty of the law, and the act by which they have been redeemed is an act in which God's character is so manifested, that the soul which sees it lives by it, i.e. receives the eternal life which was in the Father and was manifested in the Son, even that eternal life which consists in knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent. The soul which believes not in this act which manifests God's holy love is guilty of refusing the testimony of God concerning His Son, and shuts out the eternal life, and falls under the sentence of the second death - second, because the first death is done away.⁵⁰

In other words, sinners are no longer condemned for breaking the law, but only for rejecting the gospel. As J.S. Candlish was to point out, this amounted to an incipient Liberalism in Erskine's theology, i.e. a humanistic, non-forensic theology of the universal fatherhood of God and brotherhood of men, since Erskine's position removed the sanctions of law as a constituent element in man's relationship to his Maker.⁵¹ Erskine has set aside law, justice, retribution, as things which were dealt with once and for all in Christ, and as now having no practical relevance to the experience of man before God. His attempt to relate future judgment solely to the gospel is surely somewhat grotesque, given that the majority of the human race live and die without ever hearing it.

Chalmers, I think, would not have been greatly impressed by Erskine's arguments. Its importance for us is that it shows us the direction in which Erskine's theology was now inexorably moving.

In late October or November, McLeod Campbell attended another meeting of Glasgow's theological society. The occasion proved ominous:

I was at Glasgow a fortnight ago, attending a meeting of our clerical society, and had the pain of hearing an essay against the Gospel, from Dr. H., which all received with plaudits but myself.⁵²

"Dr. H." was William Hamilton of Strathblane, a staunch Westminster Calvinist, who in the following year was to produce two blistering anti-Rowite pamphlets. His "essay against the Gospel" would have been a rejection of Malan and Campbell's doctrine of assurance. The fact that Campbell could describe it in these terms shows that he too had slidden into the dogmatic, polarised mentality which Erskine had been entertaining for the past year. Even as sympathetic an interpreter as Principal Tulloch underscores this fact, viz. that Campbell and Erskine shared a highly dogmatic and critical attitude towards those who disagreed with them:

There is something painful, I confess, in their readiness of judgment, and their incapacity to recognise how much Christian good there may be in opinions differing from their own - in other words, in their failure to perceive the impossibility of any form of words - of one school or another - containing what they called "the truth of God" to the exclusion of all others.⁵³

However true this may be, the isolation of Campbell's position is clear in that by his own confession he found

no supporters at the meeting of the theology society; nor should we expect him to have done so, since by now almost all the Evangelical pulpits in the area around Glasgow were closed to him. The ministers of Greenock had themselves refused to preach in the seamen's chapel of that highly industrialised and overpopulated town, unless Campbell and Robert Story were debarred from so doing. Campbell and Story's names were accordingly removed from the list of officiating clergymen at the chapel. The only minister who took no part in this ostracising action was Dr. Scott of the Middle Parish, father of A.J. Scott⁵⁴. The net was tightening; in the words of one of Story's friends and parishioners, Alan Kerr, "as the opposition chiefly comes from the Evangelical clergy, whose influence is so extensive, it is formidable."⁵⁵ The polarised mind seems to have been the order of the day all round.

One final fact of importance remains to be related amid the gathering storm of 1829. Sometime during that year - it is not clear exactly when, although it may well have been in November, when A.J. Scott's mother died - Scott was back in Greenock, where he had a fateful encounter with a young woman named Mary Campbell, who was suffering from a variety of consumption. Scott visited her, and used the occasion to express his views on baptism with the Holy Spirit. Edward Irving tells the tale:

[Mary] Being a woman of a very fixed and constant spirit, he [Scott] was not able, with all his power of statement and argument, which is unequalled by that of any man I have ever met with, to convince her of the distinction between regeneration and baptism with the Holy Ghost; and when he could not prevail he left her with a solemn charge to read over the Acts of the Apostles with that distinction in her mind, and to beware how she rashly rejected what he believed to be the truth of God. By this young woman it was that God, not many months after, did

restore the gift of speaking with tongues
and prophesying to the Church.⁵⁶

In this way, by his fearlessly independent and passionately argued opinions, the young intellectual Scott sowed the seeds of that remarkable religious phenomenon which in 1830 was to involve himself, Irving, Campbell and Erskine in confusion, calamity and tragedy. To that story we must now direct our thoughts.

(iii) Evangelicalism assaulted

In January 1830 Erskine's Christology developed one stage further. At least, it is only ^ethan that the evidence for such a development appears. Up until this point, Erskine had believed in the traditional Evangelical doctrine of the atonement, that Christ satisfied the legal justice of God on behalf of sinners by substituting Himself for them at the bar of heaven's equity, suffering their penalty to free them from its obligation. Admittedly he had construed this along moral government lines, interpreting divine justice as public law rooted in God's benevolent concern for the ordered well-being of the universe, rather than an intrinsic quality of retribution in God's inner being; nevertheless, he had accepted a legal, forensic understanding of the atoning death of Christ. In a letter dated 15th January 1830, however, he outlined a new understanding in which, although the language of "penalty" is retained, the substance has been altered.

Erskine's new understanding was basically the notion which McLeod Campbell was to popularise in 1856 in his classic

work, The Nature of the Atonement, viz. the notion of "vicarious repentance". Erskine himself was to go into print with this notion in 1831 in his own most revolutionary book, The Brazen Serpent. According to this new understanding of Erskine's, that aspect of Christ's work which atones for sin is not His vicarious bearing of sin's penalty, but His personal confession of the sinfulness of sin and the holiness of God, a confession expressed and acted out by His submission to death as sin's penalty in His character as the organic representative of the human race. Erskine had switched attention from the passion of Christ (whether physical or mental) to the spirit in which Christ underwent His passion, seeing the latter as constituting the true atonement. God was so pleased by His Son's perfect acknowledgement of human sin and divine holiness that He determined to bestow forgiveness and eternal life to penitent sinners on that basis.

Christ's representative capacity Erskine now interpreted in an organic, racial sense rather than a legal, federal sense. Christ was the "head", "root", "heart" or "fountain" of the collective human organism. As such, He had our sinful nature, but never Himself personally sinned; hence His submission to our penalty was not bare justice, but a free act on His part, and thus a meritorious ground for reward from His Father.

The relevant sections from Erskine's letter are as follows:

The virtue of Christ's sacrifice is intimately connected with His being the root of humanity. He did not take hold of a branch, He took the very root. He came into the place which Adam had occupied. He came into that place where the sap of the tree was as in its fountain.

He became the heart where all the blood was.
And when He offered Himself as a sacrifice,

and then entered the heavenly holy place, with the blood in His hands, He presented not the blood of an individual, but the blood of the race - the heart-blood. He said, The penalty pronounced upon the humanity was death; and here the penalty has its execution, for this is the life-blood of the humanity - the life-blood of the heart drained out - the sap of the root drained out. Well, but what of this? As far as Christ was merely the representative (although a full representative) of the whole humanity, His death as a sacrifice could not be a reason or ground for bestowing a blessing on the humanity. The old corrupted sap was strained out under the penalty, and in fulfilment of the penalty; but this was no more than what was due, it was bare right ... The great secret is, He was in the world, but He was not of the world. He was in our fallen nature. He took part of the same flesh and blood of which the children partook, but He sinned not. He fulfilled all righteousness. He kept the Law ... He Himself as an individual also had fulfilled all righteousness; not being subject to the penalty, but being the Head of the fallen family, He freely subjected Himself to the penalty, and thus acknowledged the justice of the sentence on the family ... In all this doing and suffering Jesus gave such glory to God, He so met and fulfilled the desires of God's heart, the longings of His love, and the purity of His holiness - He so declared the righteousness of God in condemning sin and in forgiving the sinner, - that it became God, as the God of holy love, to bestow the blessing through Him, that is, to make Him the foundation of a new life to that nature which He had¹ assumed, and for which He had made atonement.

It is interesting that Erskine wrote this letter to an inquirer (identity unknown) who had first written to Erskine specifically asking him for his views on the doctrine of the atonement. Evidently Erskine's opinions were of sufficient significance now to attract such attention.

The month of January also saw the publication of Edward

Irving's Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of our Lord's Human Nature, in which he threw down the following challenge:

There never was such a crisis in the Church. Now then, O ye people of the Lord, quit you like men and be strong. It is a day of decision: there is no longer any room for temporising. Every truth is called in question: first advent, second advent, God's love, God Himself, whether we are to have a God made in the schools of theology or the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.²

Irving's foes were not impressed by such grandiose rhetoric. The January, February and March issues of the Edinburgh Christian Instructor carried lengthy and merciless reviews of Irving's Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of our Lord's Human Nature and other Irvingite literature, from the sharp pen of Marcus Dods of Belford, whose patristic learning certainly got the better of Irving's. Dods professed that

often in utter despair of escaping from the interminable waste of words, have we tossed down his Irving's volume, and betaken ourselves, by way of relaxation, to the more intelligible and more profitable speculations of Thomas Aquinas.³

On January 31st, death struck the Erskine family. Charles Stirling, Christian's husband, died from illness at Cadder. According to Erskine's account, it was a profoundly edifying event in which Charles Stirling met his death with vibrant and victorious Christian faith.

From the beginning of his illness he anticipated the result, and he welcomed it as his Father's summons calling him home. God did great things for him, and during

the last days of his life, whilst the struggle was going on, the Good Shepherd never left him for a moment. I was with him the last two days, and heard him say many sweet things, which are now like balm to poor Christian's heart. He said often, "Beloved and glorious Redeemer." "No perplexity, no alarm." "I see the splendour before me." "Oh that He should have done this for such a worm as I am!"⁴

It must also have been deeply gratifying to Erskine that his sister's husband gave his dying imprimatur to Erskine's distinctive doctrines. Erskine records this in a letter to his boyhood friend and cousin James Stirling of Kippenross, who seems himself to have been antagonistic to Westminster Calvinism, at least at this period, although details are lost.

He saw the whole truth fully and distinctly, and rejoiced in it. Davie and I arrived here at four o'clock on Friday morning, and he survived till Saturday night, between nine and ten. He gave us a loving and cheerful welcome; he told us that his soul was full of peace and joy in the Lord, that God was all light, and no darkness at all; he then said to me, "It has just come to me like a flash of light that you were right about these things;" and then, turning to Christian, he said, "And James and Mary spoke a great deal about it to us also." God thus put a testimony in His servant's heart and mouth at that solemn moment ... ⁵

"These things", Hanna explains, meant the universality of the atonement and its associated doctrines.⁶

Charles Stirling's death brought out the best in Erskine, galvanising into action his talent as a comforter, and especially as the writer of consolatory epistles. Some weeks after Charles' death, he wrote to Christian about

her husband's end:

He has bid an eternal adieu to sin and sinful flesh, and he is waiting, in joyful hope, the day when the kingdom of Christ shall be manifested in glory on this earth. Although we remain on earth, we are called to the same high calling, to rejoice in God and to wait for His Son from heaven, even Jesus, who saves us from the wrath to come.

My darling Kitty, how are you? How is the spirit, and how is the frail tabernacle? He hath said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Oh may He grant you to live very near to Him - in the secret of His presence, under the shadow of His wings - and to feed on the hidden manna, even Jesus our Lord and our Life - flesh of our flesh - bone of our bone.⁷

Here is Erskine's Christian warmth and sympathy: the other side of his character, somewhat obscured in the polemical dust and heat of the Row controversy. The man who could so contemptuously write off the Evangelical ministers of his native land as mere scribes and pharisees, was also the man who could write the sort of delicate and uplifting letter from which we have just quoted. We might call it the paradox of Thomas Erskine; one suspects that it is really just the paradox of human nature.

In February Erskine's latest literary offering to the Christian public appeared, his Introductory Essay to Extracts of Letters to a Christian Friend from a Lady. In this fairly lengthy essay, Erskine for the first time publicly and unreservedly attacked his Scottish Evangelical co-religionists in the most relentless terms for their opposition to the doctrines proclaimed by himself and McLeod Campbell.

The letters to which Erskine's essay was prefaced were

a collection of epistles from the pen of some unknown Christian lady who believed in the universality of God's redeeming love and Christ's atoning sacrifice. They do not make very interesting reading. Erskine's introduction is as long as the aggregate of the letters and far more readable. One feels that the letters were there for the sake of the essay, rather than vice versa.

Much of Erskine's essay is a re-run of the Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel, and we need not dwell on his various assertions as to universal atonement and pardon. Other sentiments which we have seen in his personal correspondence now appear as public utterances, for instance on the subject of election and final judgment. Concerning election he states:

God's love ... does not flow through the channel of election, neither does the gift nor the atonement of Christ.⁸

God foresaw the atonement would be ineffectual due to man's native and universal unbelief, and therefore

the electing word came forth, saying "compel some to come in". And thus is the creature condemned throughout and God is glorified. And he who believes believes because he has been compelled to come in.⁹

The separation of the atonement from its effective reception greets us again.

Concerning final judgment, Erskine argues that condemnation at the last day will not be for breaking the law but for rejecting the gospel's universal pardon.

But it may be asked, what sort of a pardon is that, which admits of a man's being finally

condemned? Is it consistent with justice that a man should be condemned for an offence which had been already pardoned? No surely! What is the meaning then of a man being pardoned and yet condemned after all? The explanation is just this: he is not condemned for the offence which had been pardoned but for a new one: he is not condemned for breaking the law but for rejecting the gospel. ¹⁰

Eternal death, Erskine contends, is purely a gospel penalty. The sanction of the law was physical death and that only. The fact that all men will be raised from the dead proves that the legal penalty has been universally cancelled and that all are pardoned as far as law-breaking is concerned:

in the resurrection of the unbelievers a testimony will be given that Christ had died for them - for only thus could they have been delivered from the power of the grave. ¹

Erskine seems to have manoeuvred himself into an impossible position here. The New Testament does rather clearly say that "Jesus delivers us from the wrath to come", i.e. the coming judgment of the last day, which implies that all believers are liable to hell apart from Christ, and not merely to physical death. Erskine himself quoted this verse (I THESS. 1:10) in his consolatory letter to Christian cited previously. Moreover, there is something very strained in saying that hell is a penalty only for gospel unbelief, since it means that Erskine's glad tidings of universal love have secured a far more agonising fate for many sinners than they faced under the law. If sinners can believe this good news only by the compelling word of election, and not all are elected, how is Erskine's scheme more universal or illustrative

of God's love than Westminster Calvinism?

Other elements of Scotland's traditional theology come under Erskine's critical eye in this essay. He rejects the usefulness of both the "sufficiency of the atonement" formula and the "offer of grace" formula in evangelism. These are but futile attempts to graft the true gospel onto the vine of limited atonement. It is no use, Erskine argues, telling a man that Christ's death is sufficient for him, if one adds that it does not actually apply to him without his doing something. He is thus necessarily led to look inward for the ground of his confidence.¹² As to the "offer of grace" - that God offers Christ as a Saviour to all - this leaves a man graceless unless he accepts the offer, and he is thus again thrown back on himself to discover whether he has accepted the offer.

The offer of the gospel does not refer to the pardon but to the enjoyment of the pardon. This is an important distinction.¹³

The pardon is an objective fact; sinners are summoned to believe it. If they do, they enjoy the inward benefit of the fact. But it remains a fact which is true of them whether or not they care to credit it.

Erskine also now repudiates the doctrine of imputed righteousness, that Christ's obedience is legally reckoned to the believer so that God accepts him as righteous on account of Christ's righteousness. He prefers something akin to the Arminian doctrine that it is the faith of the believer which constitutes his righteousness before God:

faith in the gospel is reckoned righteousness by God because it recognises God's righteousness and thus puts man in his right state before God, which is the state of a sinner who knows that his sin has been condemned and yet that he has been forgiven and that he is loved with a love passing knowledge. When a man does not know this he is in his wrong state; when he knows this he is in his right state, i.e. the state of righteousness as God reckons it.¹⁴

This is contrary to Westminster Confession 9:1, where God is said to reckon believers righteous

not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience, to them as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them ...¹⁵

Erskine's rejection of this doctrine should be taken as an indicator of the by now unstoppable anti-forensic impetus of his theological evolution.

Erskine's understanding of the vexed question of assurance receives interesting treatment in the essay. It is clear from his statements that by personal assurance he did not mean the assurance that one is a true Christian, or the assurance of eternal life here and hereafter. He meant the assurance that one is loved by God and that one's sins are forgiven. His separation of forgiveness from sanctification and eternal life is nowhere more obvious, and more obviously confusing, than in the following discussion of assurance:

If the law really requires love, then nothing short of a personal assurance of being loved and forgiven can be a sufficient motive, for it is absolutely certain that no man can love God or look upon Him otherwise than as an enemy until he knows that

He has forgiven him his sins and loves him as a Father; for "we love God because He first loved us". Why then is the necessity of personal assurance so generally denied amongst us? Just because the general religion of our land is that the gospel does not tell any man that his sins are forgiven. Now if this be so, a man may believe the gospel without knowing that his sins are forgiven him; that is, without personal assurance; for faith cannot draw more out of the gospel than what is in it. And if he may believe the gospel without personal assurance he may be saved without personal assurance, for he that believeth the gospel is certainly saved. But if a man can be saved without a personal assurance that his sins are forgiven him, he may be saved without confidence in God or love to God or giving glory to God; for he cannot have confidence in God nor can he love God nor give God glory until he knows that his sins are forgiven ... 16

It is doubtful whether this is what McLeod Campbell meant by assurance, with his "personal interrogations" - "Are you born again? Do you know yourself to be a child of God?" - and it is certainly not what Malan or his adversaries meant. Once again we see the labyrinthine nature of the assurance debate and its tendency towards hopeless confusion.

Much of Erskine's essay is given over to a frontal attack on what he felt was the selfishness of Evangelical religion. He was convinced that self-love, rather than love for God or Christ, stood at the heart of the Evangelicalism of his day, and consequently accused it of a complete betrayal of the genius of the Christian gospel. The religion of the natural man, he maintains, consists in the belief that he can procure God's mercy and blessing by something in himself, his own personal qualities or actions. Heaven is to be secured and hell

avoided by the achievements of self.

Now it is obvious that this is a system of pure selfishness and that the man who acts under its influence must be in everything that he thinks or does be serving himself and seeking his own interest; and that God is considered in it merely as a Being whose power makes it a matter of primary importance to appease His resentment and obtain His favour. According to this religion God is sought not for Himself but for His gifts ... But the man who acts in a particular way in order to obtain Heaven or to avoid Hell is as thoroughly selfish (only on a larger scale) as the man who acts in a particular way to obtain a thousand pounds or to avoid the gallows ... This is the religion of every natural man, whether he be called a Protestant or a Papist or a Hindu or a Mahometan. It is man's religion; and it is in fact nothing else than his natural selfishness acting in relation to the things of eternity, just as his principle of worldly conduct is selfishness acting in relation to the things of time. ¹⁷

Is it not true that men are taught that God's love and forgiveness, and an interest in Christ, are bestowed only on those who have a true faith, and that a true faith must be evidenced by its fruits? And is it not the universal consequence of this that people are set to the business of acquiring a true faith and what they conceive to be the fruits of faith, viz. repentance and holiness, in order to obtain forgiveness? Is not this the business of the great mass of religious people in the land? Are they not just engaged in this business of seeking a pardon? ... that I have given a faithful description of the general religion of the country, I am confident few who are acquainted with the religious people in it will deny. If you ask a serious man what his hope is before God he will very probably answer, "I hope that there is a work of the Spirit in my heart - I hope that I am a believer"; and if you then ask him what it is that he believes, he will answer that Jesus Christ

died for all that should believe in Him. If you say, this is good news indeed for those who know themselves to be believers - are you sure that you are one? He will answer, I hope that I am a believer; ask him again, and what do you believe? He will answer as before, that Christ died for believers - and so on, in a circle. And thus it appears that the man's hope is really founded on nothing at all but what he conceives to be the favourable state of his own mind. He has little or no confidence at all, and all that he has is in himself - in his own faith.

This is the leprosy which has overspread the land. And whence does it proceed? It proceeds from the voice of the shepherds who tell the people that although the gospel is a proclamation of God's love and of forgiveness of sins through Christ - yet that those only are loved and those only are forgiven who have faith in the gospel. I do not speak of the authorised standards of any church, I speak of the religion taught to the people. This is the fountainhead of the leprosy - and let the shepherds look to it, and let the flocks look to it. This doctrine is the standing doctrine of the land and it is nothing else than making the cross of Christ of none effect. It is a false gospel which places the ground of confidence not in God but in the creature. It is a false gospel which mocks man with a semblance of good but gives him nothing. It makes the whole matter a peradventure. It takes the name of good news, yet it tells nothing which can give peace to a soul.¹⁸

There is little one can say by way of elucidation with respect to Erskine's powerful language here. One should perhaps simply underline once more the fact that it wholly negates the picture of Erskine as an uncontroversial, retiring spirit who had nothing but broad-minded charity for believers of all sorts. Here, rather, we see Erskine the gladiator: a man of militant convictions and polemical ardour. He believed so strongly in the rightness and

spiritual importance of the doctrines of universal grace that he could not keep silent, but must commend them publicly and passionately, even at the cost of having to attack those Evangelicals who disagreed with him, drawing obloquy on himself for so doing.

The orthodox response to this essay will be examined in section (v), in which a general survey of the literature of the Row controversy for 1830 will be undertaken. Before moving on, however, we ought to take note of the very interesting appendix which Erskine attached to his anonymous lady's letters, in the shape of a brief excursus on the opinions of James Fraser of Brea regarding universal atonement¹⁹. Fraser (1639 - 99), a Covenanting divine, was generally credited with the authorship of a Treatise on Justifying Faith, published after his death in two parts in 1722 and 1749. Although a supralapsarian of the school of Samuel Rutherford, Fraser came to accept a doctrine of universal atonement, owing to his inability to see how he as a preacher could offer Christ indiscriminately without such a foundation. Christ died as legal representative of the whole human race, he argued, in order firstly to provide an adequate basis for the free and indiscriminate offer of the gospel, and secondly to bring about the greater condemnation of the non-elect who refuse to accept their Saviour and thus experience "gospel wrath" on the day of judgment. Like Erskine and Campbell, Fraser traced to the doctrine of limited atonement the lack of assurance which many believers felt; they could not gain immediate assurance of the power and sufficiency of Christ's death to save them, since He did not die for them unless they were elect, and thus they were thrown back on themselves to discover whether they were elect - whether they had true faith - as a prerequisite to an assurance of Christ's salvific adequacy. Erskine quotes Fraser to this and similar effect at some

length. It is doubtful whether this helped his cause, however, since Fraser's views had long been known and repudiated in Scottish Calvinistic theology. What remains interesting is the evident need Erskine felt to try to give his views some kind of historical pedigree, as a polemical weapon; he had already tried to enlist Martin Luther's aid in the Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel. Historical theology was never Erskine's strong point, but the exigencies of controversy drove him to make the effort.

(iv) The charismatic movement

It was toward the end of March 1830 that the Row controversy entered its new and fateful charismatic phase. The key figure in this transition was Mary Campbell of Fernicarry in Rosneath, at the head of the Gareloch. Although suffering from consumption and largely bedridden, Mary had been the centre of attention for a growing circle of religious admirers ever since the publication of a memoir of her deceased sister Isabella's life. This memoir, entitled Peace in Believing, had been written by Robert Story, Rosneath's parish minister and (as we have seen) close friend of McLeod Campbell; it was published in 1829, and drew many to Fernicarry on a kind of pilgrimage to visit Isabella's cottage. The aged William Wilberforce was among the memoir's professed admirers. Mary herself had frequently been mentioned in her sister's memoir, and not unnaturally attracted to herself the feelings of religious interest and excitement which had been stimulated by Story's account of the young Isabella's exalted piety and spiritual experiences. Story's son described Mary Campbell thus:

She was a woman of great personal attractions, had a beautiful face, and soft eyes, with drooping lids, which she seldom raised. She was very clever, and, considering her obscure circumstances, was well informed. Her character, however, lacked the moral strength of Isabella's, and her enthusiastic imaginative mind was not so strictly controlled as might have been desired, by keen and clear instincts or perceptions of right and wrong. There was in her, in fact, much of the nature and disposition which have, from age to age, furnished the Church with mystics. ¹

This was the Mary Campbell with whom A.J. Scott had argued in 1829 about the distinction between regeneration and baptism in the Spirit, the latter being linked with the "spiritual gifts", i.e. speaking in tongues, prophecy and miraculous healing. The first of these - speaking in tongues - greatly interested Mary and her circle, since a number of them felt called to the mission field, and hoped that God would give them a supernatural ability to speak the language of the unevangelised peoples to whom He would direct them.

In March 1830, then, Mary Campbell signalled the dawn of "Irvingism" (or the Catholic Apostolic Church) by speaking in tongues. Irving himself describes the event:

It was on the Lord's day; and one of her [Mary's] sisters, along with a female friend, who had come to the house for that end, had been spending the whole day in humiliation, and fasting, and prayer before God, with a special respect to the restoration of the gifts. They had come up in the evening to the sick-chamber of their sister, who was laid on a sofa, and along with one or two others of the household, they were engaged in prayer together. When in the midst of their devotion, the Holy Ghost came in mighty power upon the sick woman [Mary] as she lay in her weakness, and constrained her to speak at great length, and with superhuman strength, in an unknown

tongue, to the astonishment of all who heard, and to her own great edification and enjoyment in God, - "for he that speaketh in a tongue edifieth himself." She has told me that this first seizure of the Spirit was the strongest she ever had; and that it was in some degree necessary that it should have been so, otherwise she would not have dared to give way to it.²

Mary believed that the language she had spoken was a real human language, bestowed by God for the purpose of missionary preaching; she later decided that she could speak more than one strange tongue, one of them (she believed) being Turkish, another that of the Pelew Islanders.³ However, her bedridden condition prevented her from putting this theory to the test for the time being.

Meanwhile, in Port Glasgow at the eastern edge of Greenock, the charismatic movement had its second manifestation in the home of James and George MacDonald, young twin brothers (born in 1800) and local shipbuilders. They were devout men, having both undergone religious conversion in 1828, and well acquainted with Mary Campbell, although their charismatic experience occurred independently of hers. The MacDonalds were also acquainted with McLeod Campbell, and had visited Row to hear his preaching; they themselves believed in universal atonement, assurance as being of the essence of faith, Irving's Christology and millennial views, and (significantly) the permanent validity of the charismata of tongue-speaking prophecy, etc.⁴ There is some confusion about the sources of the MacDonalds' beliefs; specifically on this last point, their biographer claims they derived their belief in the charismata from private Bible study, but R.H. Story asserts that it was a sermon by the seemingly ubiquitous A.J. Scott which brought them to that position.⁵ If the latter, it was doubtless the sermon published in early 1830 and

entitled Neglected Truths. Hints on I Corinthians XIV, in which Scott had identified the "gift of the Holy Spirit" with God's immediate working in and through the human soul in a miraculous way, quite distinct from sanctification.

The MacDonald brothers had three sisters, one of whom, Margaret MacDonald, had been seriously ill for eighteen months, during which she had experienced times of spiritual exaltation akin to those of Isabella Campbell. It was Margaret who proved instrumental in the initiation of the MacDonald household into the charismatic experience. One of the other MacDonald sisters describes what happened:

At dinner-time, James and George came home as usual, whom she [Margaret] then addressed at great length, concluding with a solemn prayer for James, that he might at that time be endowed with the power of the Holy Ghost. Almost instantly James calmly said, "I have got it." He walked to the window, and stood silent for a minute or two. I looked at him, and almost trembled, there was such a change upon his whole countenance. He then, with a step and manner of the most indescribable majesty, walked up to Margaret's bed-side, and addressed her in those words of the twentieth Psalm, "Arise, and stand upright." He repeated the words, took her by the hand, and she arose ... ⁶

This was in March 1830, soon after Mary Campbell's experience of glossolalia. James immediately wrote a letter to Mary, commanding her also to arise and stand upright. Mary did so, apparently miraculously healed, like Margaret MacDonald. A fortnight later on April 18th, the MacDonald brothers both received the gift of tongues at a private prayer meeting in their home. In James MacDonald's words:

On Friday evening while we were all met for prayer, utterance was given to George in an unknown tongue, and next to me. It is manifestly not of ourselves: we have no

more power over it than a trumpet has over its sounds - I mean control as to forming the words; for the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets, in as far as they can refrain from speaking.⁷

These events naturally provoked a great stir of interest and excitement. McLeod Campbell visited the MacDonalds the very next day after their experience of tongue-speaking, and listened to James exercising his newfound ability. Campbell demanded an interpretation of the strange sounds, quoting from I COR. 14:13 - "Let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret." George MacDonald thereupon received the gift of interpretation, and announced that James' words meant, "Behold He cometh, Jesus cometh."⁸ According to Campbell, all the utterances referred to the second advent of Christ,⁹ and James MacDonald himself interpreted the appearance of the spiritual gifts in an eschatological light:

Everyone who sees these signs at all must see them as signs of the near approach of the Son of Man.¹⁰

Mary Campbell moved to Helensburgh, a few miles east of Row, after her "miraculous" recovery of health, and spent the summer months there as the focus of intense religious excitement. Many flocked to her pentecostal banner. In the words of Robert Story, her minister:

She [Mary] was in the midst of those tumultuous meetings in Helensburgh and Port Glasgow, receiving the homage of all classes of those religionists who were panting after novelties.¹¹

A Greenock clergyman, the Rev. A. Robertson, gave a graphic

description of the scene:

Among their number they can reckon merchants, divinity students, writers to the Signet, advocates ... I have known gentlemen who rank high in society come from Edinburgh, join in all the exercises, declare their implicit faith in all Mary Campbell's pretensions, ask her concerning the times and seasons, inquire the meaning of certain passages of Scripture, and bow to her decisions with the utmost deference as one inspired by Heaven.¹²

Another "gift" was received by Mary at Helensburgh, that of Spirit-dictation, "writing in the Spirit". Story reported that she could cover sheets of paper "with inconceivable rapidity" in strange letters and characters.¹³ Story himself was at first favourably if cautiously impressed by these phenomena, and wrote to Thomas Chalmers that he felt that

these things are of God, and not of men.
If a delusion, it is one of the most cunning
Satan has ever devised.¹⁴

McLeod Campbell was also rather impressed and also wrote to Chalmers expressing a very cautiously positive attitude.¹⁵ One wonders in his case whether this was not owing to the fact that the "inspired utterances" of the tongue-speakers, when interpreted, sometimes turned out to be declarations of his own distinctive doctrines. For example:

Woe to all who limit the love of God.
See every man a redeemed sinner. Clasp
him to your bosom: he is dear to Jesus.
Clasp the vilest to your bosom: cast your-
self at his feet: pour God's love into him:
it presseth for entrance to the vilest.
Tis holy love to cleanse the vilest.¹⁶

From the outset the charismatic movement and the Rowite theology of universal grace were thus inextricably linked. Consequently those who accepted the theology tended to look favourably on the charismata, whereas orthodox Calvinists, who rejected the theology, rejected the charismata also (to accept them would have meant accepting as inspired such utterances of anti-Calvinist doctrine as those cited above). The typical Calvinistic reaction to the new movement was exemplified by Andrew Thomson, who in a letter to one of the Haldane brothers in April wrote:

The folks are actually mad. In this marvellous thing many believe - a writer to the signet, an advocate, Thomas Erskine himself, Rev. Mr. Campbell of Row, it is said, and foolish girls and old women innumerable. Is not all this most melancholy? ¹⁷

He complained in July of the flippancy of the charismatic folk, that they "talk of working miracles as familiarly as sober people talk of putting up an umbrella".¹⁸ His description of the character of the charismatics was unflattering:

they are persons in whose minds imaginative-ness, or sentimentalism, or the romantic in religion, or the love of novelty, is so predominant, that sober and established truth has no chance of a kind reception, or a permanent abode - with whom, whatever is wild, or new, or mystical, or removed from ordinary thought, and ordinary feeling, and ordinary belief, finds a ready and exclusive welcome ... ¹⁹

Thomas Chalmers, however, true to form, reacted much more cautiously:

Incredulous as I am respecting it, I do not presume to determine what may or may not be included within the infinite variety of

Divine dispensation. I just hold myself open to evidence.²⁰

He wrote to Robert Story, an old acquaintance, for first-hand information, and received the generally favourable reply from which we quoted above.

Erskine visited Port Glasgow in summer and stayed for six weeks in the house of the MacDonalds. He was not only impressed, but overwhelmingly convinced of the genuinely supernatural and heavenly origin of the charismatic phenomena which he witnessed. He visited Alan Kerr, Robert Story's friend, after experiencing the phenomena for the first time via James MacDonald, and poured out his enthusiastic response. "Mr Erskine was in floods of tears today speaking of it at my bedside", reported Kerr.²¹ In a somewhat more sober strain, Erskine reported the matter to his sister Davie's husband, Captain Paterson, in a letter dated 15th October:

It was a very remarkable meeting. There was a manifestation of the presence and supernatural working of the Spirit of God beyond anything that I had witnessed. The voices struck me also very much, perhaps more than the tongues. It was not their loudness, although they were very loud, but they did not sound to me as if they were the voices of the persons speaking; they seemed to be uttered through them by another power ... I am quite sensible, as you must be after what you have witnessed, that it is impossible to convey in words any idea of what took place that evening. Though there had been no new tongue spoken, the supernatural character of the meeting would have been just the same; the tongues scarcely added to it at all.²²

Erskine, then, became an ardent convert to the charismatic

movement, although he never exercised any of the spiritual gifts himself. Typically, he felt the need to publicise his views to the world, to commend to men what he believed to be this new manifestation of the presence and power of God. This he did in a tract entitled The Gifts of the Spirit, which appeared in the latter months of 1830, i.e. not long after Erskine's first-hand encounter with the charismatic phenomena at the Gareloch.

The Gifts contains an indictment of the Christianity of Erskine's day similar to that which Erskine had expressed in his Introductory Essay at the start of the year.

There is a life of holy love yearning over the world and yet condemning the world, that breathes forth from all these descriptions of the New Testament church, to which we see no parallels in the Christianity and the church of our days. And as the life is wanting, so the effects of the life are wanting. There is no testifying on the part of the church against the world that its deeds are evil, and therefore the world does not hate the church nor its Christianity. And this is the reason why there is no persecution now. It is not because the world loves the light any better than it did - but just because the light does not condemn its darkness.²³

There probably never was a time when the forms and names of religion were so much recognised as now - whilst along with this recognition everything supernatural is most carefully excluded from it. Men have no objection to a doctrine, of which they may make themselves the judges - but they shrink from a living God - and I cannot but feel disposed to expect and to welcome any forthcomings of God which may awake the world out of its sleep of Atheism - and which may stain the pride of all creature glory - and destroy the delusions of formality and intellect which have so decidedly taken the place of the Spirit and the life.²⁴

This is familiar territory. There can be no doubt that Erskine had the contemporary Evangelical world in mind in these critical utterances. The extent to which he was justified in thinking that world spiritually lifeless is beyond our remit to decide. It does seem evident, however, that he was not alone in his spiritual discontent, for the Row movement and its charismatic developments would scarcely have occurred in a climate of widespread spiritual satisfaction. At any rate, Erskine saw in the Gareloch pentecost the answer to his sense of inner need for the reality of God. Here, apparently, was God breaking forth into human life in a tangible fashion, acting, speaking, healing, guiding. What more could a seeking soul desire as evidence that God was gloriously alive, active, and concerned for His people? Erskine had doubted the truth of the biblical miracles two decades previously. Now he embraced contemporary miracles with a zeal and a sense of relief and exhilaration which surely atoned for his youthful scepticism.

With regard to the charismatic phenomena themselves, Erskine testified that they were facts. He particularly focused on the glossolalia:

the languages are distinct, well inflected, well compacted languages, they are not random collections of sounds, they are composed of words of various lengths with the natural variety, and yet possessing that commonness of character which marks them to be one distinct language. I have heard many people speak gibberish, but this is not gibberish, it is decidedly well compacted language ... After witnessing what I have witnessed among these people, I cannot think of any person decidedly condemning them as imposters, without a feeling of great alarm. I believe that it is of God - and therefore that those who lightly scorn them are contending against God. It certainly is not a thing to be lightly or rashly believed, but neither is it a thing to be lightly or rashly rejected. I say again that I cannot but

hail it as a blessed prospect that our God, who has so long refrained Himself and held His peace, and kept Himself concealed - and who has been as it were shut out of His own world for so many centuries, should again show Himself and claim the place that is due to Him ... 25

As to the theology behind the phenomena, Erskine rejected the customary interpretation which regarded the supernatural charismata as limited to the apostolic period, authenticating the teaching of the apostles and hence the New Testament canon. The gifts, he asserts, had nothing to do with the canon, and were not bestowed exclusively by the apostles. There is no hint in Scripture that any of the gifts were to cease.

And so far is it from being the case that any intimation is given in Scripture to warrant the opinion that miracles were to cease, that there is a great deal to warrant the opposite conclusion. In I COR. 13:8-10 the Apostle most decidedly teaches that until knowledge ceased to be partial, tongues should not cease - and that prophecies, tongues and partial knowledge should continue until that which is perfect is come - that is, until the restitution of all things ... Besides I cannot easily conceive that Paul should have been taught by the Spirit to leave on record such a detailed system of rules for the right use of spiritual gifts in the church, if those gifts were to be done away so soon after he had written the Epistle. 26

The historical fact of the cessation of the charismata did not prove that they ought to have ceased. On the contrary, they ought to have continued, for their function is that of

edifying the body and demonstrating the oneness of the body on earth with the glorified Head in Heaven. 27

The exalted Christ causes His power to rest on His "des-pised members".

He thus would make them feel, and others see, that power is of Him alone; and that it is no more they who live or act, but Christ that liveth and acteth in them. 28

This coincides with A.J. Scott's interpretation in his Neglected Truths: the gift of the Holy Spirit means the direct, immediate, miraculous working of God in and through the human soul.

The charismata thus performed a twofold function: they were

for the body - either for the edification of the members or for drawing in souls from the world by the manifestation of God's power among them. 29

Glossolalia in particular is

a manifestation of God acting in the creature, without the creature's cooperation, and thus it humbles before God, the living God. It is a manifestation of God, near at hand, close upon us, and thus it alarms the atheism of the heart.³⁰

The charismata comfort believers and convict unbelievers by proving that God is "a living, moving, acting God".³¹

Erskine closes the tract with an outburst of eloquence which is at once an evangelistic appeal and an apocalyptic vision. An uninhibited conviction about the Christology of universal grace motivates him in addressing unbelievers:

You are loved with the love which gave Christ to taste death for every man ... Christ hath become one flesh with you, that you might become one spirit with Him. ³²

Christ is the Head of every man without exception, and is "in" all men "as the root is in the branch".³³ This is an expression of Erskine's concept of Christ as the fountain and organic heart of all human nature, although quite what unbelievers were meant to make of it in an evangelistic setting one does not know. Erskine assures them that final judgment will be executed on the basis of their response to the all-embracing mercy of Christ. Then eschatological fervour grips the laird of Linlathen, impelling him to round off the treatise thus:

My dear reader - these things which are now taking place are just signs of the times. Listen to the voice of the sign. It tells of the near coming of Christ ... The God who made the world is again making His own voice heard in it. And is it not a thing to be desired? Have we not long been as orphans? Have we not been as homeless wanderers without a Father or a Father's house? But now the signs of the Bridegroom's approach are coming forth before Him to prepare His way - and He the true Melchizedek is at hand, the Priest of the Most High God, the king of Righteousness, the King of peace - and yet the treader of the winepress of the wrath of Almighty God.
GO YE FORTH TO MEET HIM! ³⁴

It was a remarkable performance, perhaps chiefly significant for us in the incontrovertible evidence it affords of Erskine's violently apocalyptic mentality as these turbulent years approached their dramatic finale. Erskine really believed that Christ was about to return to the earth, and that the Gareloch pentecost was His forerunner. In the calmness of retrospect it seems quite

ridiculous that religious events in Greenock should herald the end of the universe, and no doubt at the time the foes of Erskine and Campbell felt exactly the same sense of derisive disproportion between event and claim.

Erskine felt no such disproportion. His yearning for the reality of God had been overwhelmingly met, and nothing seemed too great to claim for the events in which he found himself experiencing such ecstasy - "floods of tears", we recall. God was alive, miracles were happening: Christ was returning.

It is a poignant coincidence that, as Erskine thus launched into the charismatic deeps, Thomas Chalmers should have made a perceptive remark about him to Joseph Gurney, the Quaker philanthropist, which harmonises with the judgment of Adolphe Monod delivered some years earlier in Geneva. Monod had said of Erskine:

He judges by feeling and proves by imagination.³⁵

Chalmers remarked to Gurney during a visit from the latter in July 1830:

Were Erskine at home I should be very happy to bring you together. He is a most amiable and pleasing person and one whose consistency of conduct proves the genuineness of his piety. It is true, however, that his imagination overpowers his other faculties. He assures me, that a quarter of an hour's personal examination on the spot would convince me of the truth of the West Country miracles ...³⁶

"His imagination overpowers his other faculties." When creative impulses overbear rational norms, there will be an openness to the novel and the unknown which can easily slide into a sort of superstitious credulity.

Given Erskine's psychological constitution, one is not surprised that he became an enthusiastic convert to pentecostalism when Mary Campbell and the MacDonalds spoke in tongues, healed, and prophesied. That, indeed, is not to pass any verdict on the authenticity or otherwise of the phenomena, but only to probe Erskine's motives in his acceptance of their authenticity. Something may be perfectly true in itself, where a man's motives for believing in it are very mixed. I am suggesting that Chalmers' remark opens up a window into Erskine's soul, exposing a central aspect of his readiness to credit the genuineness of the Gareloch manifestations.

The imaginative laird, however, found himself less than enthusiastically supported in his charismatic fervour by McLeod Campbell, Robert Story and A.J. Scott. Campbell had indeed been initially favourable, but only extremely cautiously so, and certainly never to the degree that Erskine was. The fact is that Campbell had other, far more pressing matters on his mind, as we shall see.³⁷ Even Campbell, however, had lost all his eschatological inhibitions, and proclaimed the end of the world:

My dear hearers, I beseech you to consider, that it [the Second Coming] is just near at hand, at the very door, according to all who have studied this matter, and have sought the teaching of God ... they are all of one mind; that that period commonly called the millennium - the reign of Christ - is just at hand. ³⁸

Robert Story, likewise, had initially opined to Chalmers that the manifestations were "of God, and not of men". But Story swiftly became disenchanted owing to what he felt was the inconsistent behaviour of Mary Campbell. She had claimed from the outset that the Holy Spirit had directly commissioned her to evangelise the heathen without

delay, else she and her father's house would perish. Her new-found linguistic abilities (tongue-speaking) she hailed as the divinely supplied equipment for this task. But the weeks lengthened into months, and the months started to become years, without the slightest effort on Mary's part to fulfil her vaunted commission. Instead she married one of her admirers, one William Rennie Caird, an Edinburgh writer's clerk (later an Evangelist in the Catholic Apostolic Church), moved to London, and began to climb the social scale, dressing in silk and enjoying aristocratic society and patronage. It was the last straw when Story heard one of Mary's devotees extol her in her presence as a paragon of self-sacrifice in the cause of the gospel, and Mary unblushingly accepted the praise. Story felt constrained to inform the prophetess that as far as he was concerned she had sacrificed nothing, and that none of the charismatic manifestations from which she had derived her reputation were authentic. He referred to prophecies which had never been fulfilled, inspired persons contradicting one another in his presence, a failed attempt to raise the dead, and other such infelicitous anomalies.³⁹ Not, indeed that Story rejected the very possibility of modern-day charismata; it was merely that he was not persuaded that the actual phenomena he had witnessed in Mary and her friends were the genuine article.

The manner of it exhibited nothing beyond human power or the workings of human fancy; but in saying this I do not implicate your sincerity [he is addressing Mary], for it has been often shown how unconsciously people have been the dupes of the workings of their own mysterious fancies. The matter of it expressed nothing beyond what I was propounding.⁴⁰

Her manner dubious and her matter unoriginal, Story pro-

ceeded to rebuke Mary severely for what he felt was her inflated self-importance, self-deception, and inconsistent conduct. Needless to say, relationships turned sour, and Story ended up fighting a lawsuit brought against him by Mary's husband, in which Mr. Caird endeavoured to gain possession of the profits accruing to Story from his memoir of Isabella Campbell. Story also earned the magisterial rebuke of his boyhood friend, Irving, who wrote to him in 1832:

Oh, Story, thou hast grievously sinned in standing afar off from the work of the Lord, scanning it like a sceptic, instead of proving it like a spiritual man. Ah, brother, repent, and the Lord will forgive thee. I am very much troubled for you.¹⁷

A.J. Scott's reaction to the charismatic manifestations was strangest of all. He had sown the seeds of the movement, yet was the first to reject its authenticity. Visiting Greenock in summer, he witnessed the gifts in action and spent time with the MacDonald brothers. He was profoundly unimpressed. Philip Newell suggests that Scott's negative reaction to the movement was due to the "anti-intellectual obscurantism" of the gifted persons, and this is almost certainly correct.⁴² A highly cultured and rational mind like Scott's must have recoiled from Mary Campbell's attitude to the place and significance of the charismata:

I look upon the system of education for the ministry to be of the Devil. It was unbelief in God which introduced it at the first, and unbelief has nourished it from that time until now. If God has promised to furnish His servants with every necessary qualification for their great work, what have they to do but step into the field, depending on Him for all?⁴³

What need to learn a language, when unbelief alone hindered the Holy spirit from bestowing it miraculously? Scott was doubtless equally shocked by the spectacle of the MacDonalds fuelling their domestic fire with classical literature from the family library, all books other than the Bible being in their view useless.⁴⁴ Perhaps he also found distasteful the inherent authoritarianism of the movement - the uncritical submissiveness with which the allegedly inspired utterances of Mary Campbell and the MacDonalds were received. Scott, the passionate intellectual and refined litterateur, found it all rather alien to his personality. Thus, "as might have been predicted of him", in Mrs. Oliphant's words, he "rejected the phenomena which his own exertions had shaped into being".⁴⁵

Erskine's only comfort among his circle was the attitude of Edward Irving, who greeted the manifestations with unqualified warmth and enthusiasm.

I did rejoice with great joy when the tidings were read to me ... that the bridal attire and jewels of the Church had been found again. ⁴⁶

Scott had persuaded Irving of the perpetual validity of the charismata prior to the Gareloch manifestations; the disciple now embraced as genuine the pretensions to a revival of the gifts which the master repudiated as counterfeit.

The final Albury conference in July 1830 had studied Scott's Neglected Truths, under Irving's inspiration, and had collectively decided that it was

their duty to pray for the revival of the gifts manifested in the primitive church;

which are wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, kinds of tongues and interpretation of tongues. ⁴⁷

Accordingly they sent a deputation composed of five Anglicans and one member of Irving's church to visit the Gareloch in September; the deputation brought back to London an entirely positive and favourable report of Mary Campbell, the MacDonalds and their gifts. This impelled groups of people to begin to meet in order to pray for the wider restoration of the charismata, and the way was thus paved for the appearance of these phenomena in Irving's own congregation and in others the following year.

McLeod Campbell, however, had other troubles on his mind, as we indicated. On the thirtieth day of the same month (March) that Mary Campbell spoke in tongues, twelve of his parishioners presented a memorial to the presbytery of Dunbarton complaining about their minister's preaching. As in the previous year, a counter-petition was presented, signed by eighty supporters of Campbell; but this time the strategem failed. The General Assembly, dominated by Campbell's adversaries, bypassed normal procedures and instructed the presbytery to proceed with the matter and to

carry on their proceedings till the cause is ripe for a final judgment, notwithstanding any appeal or complaint on preliminary points.⁴⁸

There was some wrangling about whether due constitutional process had been followed, but the investigation went ahead in spite of Robert Story's protests.⁴⁹

One of the disputed points was the use made by Campbell's foes of an act passed by the General Assembly in 1720 against the teachings of the Marrowmen, with respect to their views on the universal reference of the atonement and assurance as of the essence of faith. The General Assembly of 1830 instructed the presbytery of Dunbarton to proceed against Campbell on the grounds that the doctrines attributed to him had been condemned in the 1720 act; but in point of fact, that act had no legal standing as a doctrinal test, since it had never been remitted to presbyteries under the Barrier Act and thus had never attained the force of an obligatory statute. Andrew Thomson himself, perhaps the leading opponent of Campbell, had condemned the 1720 act, since he felt a certain sympathy with the Marrowmen. An element of injustice, or at least of legal dubiety, thus lay at the foundation of the case against Campbell, which did not augur well for Campbell in terms of the disposition of General Assembly towards him.

Dunbarton presbytery descended on Row on July 8th and heard Campbell preach from MATT. 5:1 - 12. Erskine came to give him moral support and sat in the congregation. In the course of the sermon, Campbell delivered himself of these two utterances:

God loves every child of Adam, with a love,
the measure of which is the agony of His
own Son ...

... the person who knows that Christ died
for every human being, is the person who
is in a condition to go forth to every human
being, and to say to every child of Adam,
Let there be peace with you - peace between
you and your God, for I can tell you that
the Lord Jesus shed His blood for you ... 50

That sealed his doom. The Calvinistic presbytery recorded its "detestation and abhorrence" of these state-

ments, and recommended that Campbell's accusers convert their memorial into a libel.⁵¹

Erskine was smitten to the heart by this pitiless concentration on and rejection of that point in Campbell's message which he felt to be of the essence of the gospel, "the love of God in Christ to every man".⁵² He wrote to his cousin Rachel:

Jehovah is God and not man, therefore are we not consumed. He loves these men [the presbytery deputation] with a love that seeks to enter into them, and to make them the habitation of God through the Spirit. He loves them with a love that has brought Him into the flesh to taste death for them, that He might destroy in them the works of him who had the power of death, even the devil ...⁵³

A pious and paradoxical reflection, that the God Who loved all men loved the men who believed He did not love all men, but also a luminous illustration of the polarised mind: "Jehovah is God and not man, therefore are we not consumed." Did Erskine expect the God of love to drop lightning on His Calvinistic detractors?

The libel was served at the next presbytery meeting on September 9th. Disputations of Byzantine complexity ensued regarding what exactly Campbell did and did not teach. "Indeed, it is difficult," confesses R.H. Story, son of Robert, "to track a definite meaning through the turnings and windings of the technical phraseologies and scholasticisms with which this section of the subject is encumbered" - referring to the presbyterial examination of Campbell on his doctrine of assurance.⁵⁴ One almost despairs, at times, whether Campbell himself knew what he taught on this matter. He asserted before the presbytery:

in believing the gospel, there is necessarily present in the mind, the certainty that the person believing is the object of God's love, manifested to him in the gift of Christ - the certainty that he has remission of his sins, the gift of the Spirit, and all things pertaining to life and to godliness bestowed on him, by the free grace of God; so that he feels himself debtor to God for the gift of eternal life; and this I hold to be so of the essence of faith, that is to say, so necessarily implied in the existence of true faith, that no person can be regarded as in the belief of God's testimony who is not conscious to it.⁵⁵

He called this "assurance of faith", and distinguished it from "assurance of salvation", "the object of which is the fact concerning the individual, that he himself now belongs to the class of saved ones."⁵⁶

The two assurances are distinct in themselves, and I feel it important to refer to the distinction, because, whilst I hold assurance to be of the essence of faith, I do not hold that the converted person is necessarily always in a condition of assurance,⁵⁷ as to his being in a state of salvation.

The present writer may be obtuse, but he fails to perceive the different entities which Campbell is trying to distinguish. R.H. Story remarks that:

It is greatly to be questioned whether any one not trained to the minutiae of Scotch Calvinistic theology will be able to perceive much essential difference between the two. ⁵⁸

One is constrained to agree, whilst doubting whether "the minutiae of Scotch Calvinistic theology" were really to blame for McLeod Campbell's long-winded obfuscation.

With regard to pardon, Campbell set out three possible definitions of the terms:

- 1, An absolute act of indemnity; 2, The act of God in receiving a penitent sinner;
- 3, The removal of the judicial barrier which sin interposes between God and man, "so making the fact of his being a sinner no hindrance to his coming to God as to a reconciled father." 59

Definition 2, by its very nature, applied only to believers. But Campbell's excursus on definition I revealed a strange understanding of the atonement. Of this definition of pardon he said:

Not only is it not the portion of all, but, in fact, it is not the portion of any: to neither unbeliever nor believer is any immunity from future wrath secured, apart from his being prepared for being found of God in peace at that day ... To hold otherwise is distinct Antinomianism, and makes the atonement something to take those for whom it has been made, out of the judgment of God; and not, as it really is, something to prepare them for that judgment by bringing them into the condition in which they can say, "We may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in the world." 60

Faith in Christ, seemingly, is not sufficient to secure believers against the wrath and judgment of God. It is the sanctifying effect of the atonement in making them Christlike which performs this function. Campbell had expressed similar sentiments in his sermon before presbytery in July.⁶¹ What he seems to have meant was that the atonement has secured non-condemnation for all men in the present life (universal pardon), but that in the next life only those will be uncondemned who are like Christ in personal character. Justification at the last day will be based on the sanctification of those judged.

This sounds suspiciously like classic Neonomianism, and would not have commended itself to Campbell's Calvinistic assessors.

Definition 3 Campbell proclaimed to be his understanding of universal pardon. Every man, by virtue of Christ's death, is entitled to come to God as a reconciled Father. That is, because of Christ's death, God is condemning no man but rather inviting all men back to Himself. Those who respond to His invitation become, in some higher and more positive sense, "forgiven" or "justified" - presumably in the sense of definition 2. It is this equation of God's universal invitation with non-condemnation, "non-imputation of sin", which constitutes Campbell's peculiar concept of universal pardon. If Campbell had not insisted on describing the universal invitation of the gospel that sinners should return freely to God, as a state of universal non-condemnation, one doubts whether such fearsome controversy would have erupted. H.F. Henderson's comment seems prudent:

It ought not to be forgotten that Campbell brought much of the trouble on himself by his persistent use of terms such as "pardon" in a loose and misleading sense. His manner of using that term landed him constantly in misunderstanding. He employed it to describe the state of pardonableness in which the atoning death of Christ has necessarily and unconditionally placed every sinner of mankind.⁶²

Robert Story probably did not contribute any great clarity to the doctrinal atmosphere when, in defence of Campbell, he said that he had "no hesitation in unequivocally condemning" the phrase "universal pardon", "as fitted to mislead, as not framed to give right conceptions of the truth", but nonetheless affirmed that "there is a sense in which all men are pardoned through Jesus Christ", and

went on to make a distinction between "universal atonement" and "universal redemption".⁶³

Campbell and Story also endeavoured to maintain that their doctrine was consistent with the Westminster Confession, which according to them did not teach limited atonement. A.J. Scott disagreed with them. In October 1830 he withdrew his application to be ordained as a minister of the Kirk to a Scottish congregation in Woolwich, south-east London, which had called him; he did this on the ground that he believed in universal atonement, whereas the Westminster Confession taught limited atonement. In his own words, in a letter to the Moderator of the London presbytery:

Not believing that I could, consistently with truth, sign as a confession of my faith a statement in which it is asserted that "none are redeemed by Christ but the elect only," West Conf., chap. iii. sect. 6; or that "to all those for whom He hath purchased redemption He doth certainly and effectually communicate the same" (chap. viii. sect. 8), implying "that He died for their sins only" (chap. xi. sect. 4); seeing I believe that God would have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, in testimony whereof Christ gave Himself a ransom for all men ...⁶⁴

Scott, I think, enjoyed a clearer mind here, and one can only admire his candour. He had several other objections to the Confession, relating to the Sabbath and ordination, and in the light of these disagreements he decided to relinquish his ministerial vocation, preparing instead to earn his living by teaching mathematics and classics.

Not surprisingly, Campbell's presbytery decided by a large majority that the libel against him was "relevant", i.e. that the doctrines attributed to him were erroneous doct-

rines. This meant that presbytery now had to ascertain whether Campbell had indeed entertained and promulgated these errors. Campbell himself seemed comparatively unperturbed, buoyed up as he was by a state of exalted religious feeling; in communicating the presbytery's decision to his father, he signed himself

J.M'L Campbell - abiding in the peace of
God and the secret of the Lord's presence
at Dumbarton at the Presbytery bar, 22nd
September 1830.⁶⁵

When presbytery decreed that the libel and Campbell's defence should be printed in order that all presbytery members might be able to study them before conferring with Campbell as to his beliefs, Campbell was elated and wrote to his father:

How marvellous are the doings of the Lord!
... Oh may He who put this unlooked for
leniency and kindness into their hearts,
give them to bow to His own truth, which
He has enabled me to state in these defences
... Truly the Lord is a very present help
in time of trouble.⁶⁶

The proceedings, however, dragged on in a somewhat unproductive manner. Presbytery met in October, seems to have attempted to depose Campbell on the spot, but failed due to the erudite dissent of one Dr. Fleming; they then decided to refer the whole matter to Synod, failed again due to Campbell's protests (which would have compelled a reference of the matter to General Assembly), and finally adjourned until December. In December they seem to have decided that Campbell's confession that he did teach the doctrines in question was not sufficient to depose him, in spite of the libel's relevance having been affirmed, and resolved on an examination of witnesses to be held

in February the following year. Campbell's interpretation of this bizarre turn of events is recorded in a letter to his brother, dated 1st January 1831:

At first they seemed satisfied with my own confessions, as well they might for I confessed all; but finding that my answers which I circulated among my brethren (though not at liberty to publish them, - at least, restrained by delicacy) were producing a favourable impression on many, they are now going to try and prove something more offensive than what I have admitted. I trust to be able to disappoint this wish, - for such I grieve to say it is, - and to make the truth of my honesty and candour manifest.⁶⁷

The year 1830 thus ended on a strangely muted and inconclusive note for McLeod Campbell. At least he remained sure of himself, proclaiming "how the Lord hath helped me in this His own cause".⁶⁸

(v) The controversial literature of 1830

The year saw a profusion of literature, most often in pamphlet form, connected with the Row controversy, and in this section we will examine it, excepting Erskine's two contributions, his Introductory Essay to Extracts of Letters to a Christian Lady by a Friend and Gifts of the Spirit, both of which we have already looked at.

Several sermons by McLeod Campbell were published in the course of the year. They make heavy reading - Campbell's father is reputed once to have told his son, "Man, you have a queer way of putting things"¹ - and there is little one can quote from them which Erskine did not say more clearly and eloquently in his various treatises at this

period. Proclamations of God's all-embracing love mingle with pointed assertions of universal atonement and pardon, and assurance as of the essence of faith. For instance, addressing sinners indiscriminately (not just believers), Campbell declared:

His [God's] love is so turned towards you,
and loves you with such an infinite love,
that the redemption of your souls has been
accomplished by the outpouring of the blood
of the eternal Word, who was God manifested
in the flesh, who took upon Himself the punishment of your sin.²

Most of Campbell's homilies are, unfortunately, so turgid that one feels a certain reluctant sympathy with the sarcasm of Dr. Thomson, vented in an editorial footnote to a review of Campbell's sermons in the Edinburgh Christian Instructor for May 1830. Thomson cuttingly linked McLeod Campbell's homiletic outpourings with the glossolalia of Mary Campbell:

It appears to us that the gift of tongues
- that is, the faculty of speaking what
nobody, not even Professor Lee of Cambridge,
can understand - is not confined to the Ladies.
Educated Gentlemen can evidently talk as
great gibberish as any raving female in the
kingdom. But this, say the Rowites, is
an age of miracles!³

The reference to Professor Lee is in regard to that distinguished philologist's attempts to interpret Mary Campbell's Spirit-dictated hieroglyphics. Samuel Lee of Cambridge (1753 - 1852), "one of the profoundest of linguists",⁴ was competent in a plethora of languages, mostly oriental - Hebrew, Arabic, Chaldee, Coptic, Syriac, Samaritan, Persian, etc. He was also an Anglican clergyman. Specimens of Mary Campbell's inspired writings were sent

to him to decipher, but the learned professor's verdict was unedifying, since he pronounced them to be "scrawls ... they deserve no better name".⁵ He suggested that they were the outcome of someone attempting to write Chinese without knowing the language, and declared himself "perfectly astonished that any one could for a moment suppose, either that they contain any thing legible, or that they can be the result of inspiration."⁶

Mary's "inspired" words fared no better under the scrutiny of Dr. John Reid of Glasgow, another distinguished philologist, who was sent transcriptions of Mary's tongue-speaking and specimens of her automatic writings. His judgment on the writings: "scrawls".⁷ As for the tongues, he noticed some Latin in it and some words resembling Greek, but as a whole, "Such a jumble of incoherent sounds could only proceed from a mind deranged, or from a desire to talk nonsense."⁸

A.J. Scott published two tracts in 1830, one of which, Neglected Truths. Hints on I Corinthians xiv, we have already noted. The other, On the Divine Will, was an exercise in rebalancing the doctrine of God's sovereignty with the Rowite belief in His universal redeeming love. God, he asserted, was not the Cause of all things; nothing inconsistent with His goodness can be ascribed to His causal agency. The will of man is the cause of evil. Scott distinguished between God's will and His decrees, the former being capable of frustration, the latter being invincible. The will of God is good and quite distinct from man's will; for with regard to man:

God enables him to think, but it is himself that thinks: God sustains his faculty of will, his electing power; but it is himself that wills, that chooses evil.⁹

However, God has

foreseen all acts, predetermined their measure and their issue, and the harmonising of all into a vast scheme of righteous government.¹⁰

All this really amounts to nothing more than a rejection of the scholastic doctrine of divine concursus, which is not accepted by all Reformed theologians. One is not sure how this helps to synthesise the sovereignty of God in salvation with the Scott-Campbell-Erskine view of God's universal soteric love. Scott, however, insisted on the full universality of God's redemptive will, denial of which he stigmatised as "wicked mockery of God's revelation".¹¹ Flowing from this, he argued that Christ revealed this universal redeeming love; if Christ could love anyone unto death, He must by necessity have loved all in the same way:

is it credible, is it human, that one capable of living and dying thus for any of those whom He saw truly in the mean deformity of their wickedness, could be indifferent to the eternal misery of any one of their fellow sinners? Is it human? ¹²

The repetition of the term "human" is significant, since what we see in the theology of Scott, Campbell and Erskine is precisely a "humanising" of God, theologically justified by reference to the incarnation.

The humanity of Christ is that which translates the ineffable language of the Most High into man's native tongue.¹³

It is an interesting if brief pamphlet, far more cogent and readable than Campbell's earnest and tedious floridity.

Perhaps the most striking tract to emerge from the Rowite camp in 1830 was one entitled Extracts on Faith from the Writings of the Reformers. It was probably written by Robert Story, who was something of a connoisseur of Reformation writings, far preferring them to the generally more popular Puritans. According to his friend, Dr. Wylie of Carlisle, Story took the tone of his preaching

from those old Reformers, Luther, Becon, Tyndale, etc., of whom his mind and heart were so full - from these certainly, rather than from any of the Puritan school. 14

The 1830 edition of Extracts on Faith was in fact the third and enlarged one, published in Greenock, but I have been unable to trace the earlier versions. It contains extracts from Patrick Hamilton, Luther, Calvin, Hugh Latimer, John Bradford, the Anglican Homilies, the Gallican and Scottish Confessions, and the Palatine and Belgic catechisms, among others. The content of the quotations is encapsulated in a passage from Bradford, the Marian martyr:

This death of Christ, therefore, look on as the very pledge of God's love towards thee, whosoever thou art, how deeply soever thou hast sinned. See God's hands are nailed, they cannot strike thee; His feet also, He cannot run from thee; His arms are wide open to embrace thee, His head hangs down to kiss thee, His very heart is open, so that therein see, look, spy, behold and thou shalt see nothing therein but love, love, love to thee; hide thee therefore, lay thy head there with the evangelist.¹⁵

The fact is that if the Row controversy had been fought on the historical grounds of loyalty to the teachings of the Reformers, Erskine and company would very likely have triumphed, at least with respect to universal atone-

ment and assurance as the essence of faith, although certainly not with respect to universal pardon. Fortunately or otherwise, loyalty to the Westminster Confession and even the Bible was the criterion employed by their enemies, and here the conflict proved to be weighted in the other direction.

Edward Irving published to the world his understanding of the charismata in September 1830, in a pamphlet entitled The Church in her Endowment of Holiness and Power. It was an understanding in which spiritual gifts were largely swallowed up in a new and triumphant ecclesiasticism. Referring to the gift of prophecy, Irving said:

I would say that this gift hath ceased to be visible in the Church because of her great ignorance concerning the work of Christ at His second coming, of which it is the continual sign; because of her most culpable ignorance of Christ's crowned glory, of which it is the continual demonstration; because of her indifference to the world without, for preaching to which the gift of the Holy Ghost is the continual furnishing and outfit of the Church. Since the Reformation little else has been preached besides ... the work of Christ's death unto the justification and sanctification of the believer. The dignity and office of the Church as the fullness of the Lord of all hath not been fully preached or firmly held, and is now almost altogether lost sight of. Church government, bickerings about the proper form of polity, and the standing of the civil magistrate to the Church and in the Church have been almost the only things concerning the Church which have come into question among Protestants; and there hath been no holding of her up to the heathen as the holy place of God, but on the contrary the presentation of a Book in the stead thereof.¹⁶

The charismata were manifestations of Christ's risen and exalted Lordship exercised in the Church by the Holy

Spirit. Exorcism was a token of Christ's Lordship over evil spirits; glossolalia were "the demonstration that Christ is the Lord of human spirits", since He gives men utterance in a tongue unknown to them; miraculous healing was a sign of the resurrection.¹⁷ The Church, exercising such gifts, was a revelation to the world of Christ's power, "a sign of that which we preach Christ to be - Lord of all".¹⁸ Ecclesiology thus thrust itself into the forefront of Irving's teaching:

There is no other medium of communication between Christ abiding with the Father and the world but the Church in the flesh ... she is the organ of communication between the invisible Christ and the visible world.¹⁹

It is not by putting a book into every man's hand, of the genuineness and authenticity of which it takes no mean store of learning to be convinced, but it is by a continuous Church holding forth the word of the gospel of life to the nations and attesting the truth of what they declare concerning Jesus by calling His name over all distressed nature, and giving it redemption and joy. This is what the Church was intended to be, God's witnesses of Christ to every generation, until He should send Him to accomplish all which had been preached for a witness. But now, lo! the Bible society is our Church, and the Bible is our God! ²⁰

These views, if they had been propounded a few years later, would probably have been seen as a charismatic version of the Oxford Movement. It was precisely this development of such a high ecclesiology which turned Erskine and McLeod Campbell against Irving, as we shall see.

Almost all the anti-Rowite literature of 1830 was directed specifically against Erskine. Orthodox Calvinists perceived him to be the particular fountainhead of the Gareloch heresy. This can be seen perhaps most significantly

in the fact that those who believed in universal atonement and pardon were sometimes labelled "Erskinites", and their religion "Erskinism". The Edinburgh Christian Instructor referred to the "Erskinites" on at least two separate occasions;²¹ Robert Burns of Paisley, similarly, called believers in universal pardon "the Erskinists", and posed the stinging questions: "Are not Erskinism and Christianity two very different religions?"²² More generally, the Eclectic Review spoke of "Mr. Erskine and his less gifted coadjutors", "Mr. Erskine and his little sect".²³ Dr. Thomson singled out Erskine as the source of the Row heresy, referring to its adherents in relation to Erskine as "his party" and "the relentless bigots of his own little sect".²⁴ He also spoke of the need "to deprive his [Erskine's] oracular sayings of the influence which they appeared to be exercising over ignorant and inconsiderate minds."²⁵ Hamilton of Strathblane made reference to "Mr. Erskine and his followers", "Mr. Erskine and his disciples".²⁶ The anonymous author of a pamphlet against McLeod Campbell spoke of "Mr. Erskine and his followers" (not Mr. Campbell and his followers), and classified Campbell as an Erskinite - "his known adoption of the religious opinions of Mr. Erskine".²⁷ He also said this:

When such men as Mr. Erskine become the abettors of heresy, it is no matter of surprise if minds of a less firm texture are ensnared; but neither genius, nor character, nor amiable deportment, nor ardent zeal, all of which we attribute to Mr. Erskine, should screen error from merited castigation. We wish Mr. Erskine would go back to Dundee, and sit, as he formerly did, at the feet of Mr. Russell; if he would do so, we should not yet despair of his return to a better mind; and as for Mr. C [Campbell], and some two or three more with him, they are only what their leader has made them: should he be reclaimed they cannot possibly keep their ground.²⁸

Again, Smyth of Glasgow said of Erskine that "His books are public property, and contain the only tangible and printed exposition of the new system".²⁹ Robertson of Greenock reflected with melancholy on Erskine's influence with regard to the charismatic manifestations of the Gareloch:

Although I anticipated that Mr. Erskine's system would produce enthusiasm in many of his adherents, I had no idea ... that they would ever have proceeded to such excesses.³⁰

Fernicarry has become a hotbed for the growth of every exotic which Messrs. Erskine, Campbell, Irving, etc. choose to plant...³¹

Erskine's name, significantly, heads the list. Edward Craig of Edinburgh turned Erskine's exalted views of the Gareloch manifestations against him :

if the power of miracles be the test of divine approbation, the force of the testimony lies equally against your own more erratic ministrations, and the pastoral authority and the exclusive and denunciatory bearing of your friend and colleague [McLeod Campbell] . I have not heard yet that either of you can speak with tongues or raise the dead any more than we.^{31a}

Erskine, then, would seem to have drawn on himself the plenitude of Calvinistic wrath against all things Rowite and charismatic. He was the leader of the Rowite sect of Erskinites, and polemical firepower must be directed against him. Directed against him it was, in a stream of sermons, tracts and books. There is little point rehearsing the theological arguments against Erskine's position since they follow the same lines as were laid down in the critiques of the Unconditional Freeness of

the Gospel, which we examined in some detail previously. They do contain some points of fresh interest, however. We learn, for instance, that the Rowites, as well as being labelled Erskinites, were also known as "the Gareloch school"³² and "the Dunbartonshire school".³³ Their beliefs were similarly stigmatised as "the Gairloch heresy".³⁴ The mood of unsparing antagonism which breathes through many of the orthodox treatises, the sense of the grim danger posed by the theology of Erskine and company, is quite remarkable. William Hamilton, for instance, said:

Every year is teeming with crude theories, and wild and visionary notions upon the most sacred and deeply interesting doctrines of revelation: and in proportion as these speculations are opposed to the letter and spirit of the oracles of God, they are advanced with the greater boldness, and urged with the more vehemence and pertinacity ... The opinions opposed in the following pages are of a most dangerous description. Though repugnant to the dictates of inspiration; they have met, in some quarters, with a far more ready reception than could have been anticipated ...³⁵

He referred to universal pardon as "the plausible, but ruinous heresy",³⁶ and had no hesitation in tracing its origins to a dark source:

the system that asserts the pardon of all sin, whether men believe it or not, is completely opposed to the doctrines of revelation; and, if the one come from heaven, the other has no origin there.³⁷

In similar vein, Andrew Thomson described Erskine's doctrinal scheme as inculcating "a heresy of the very worst and most pernicious description", "some of the worst heresies that have ever deformed the face of the church".³⁸ Smyth of Glasgow accused Erskine of "the worst errors

of the Pelagian and Arminian schools",³⁹ and thought that

Of the numerous delusions which have of late engaged the attention of mankind, we are aware of none which exceeds in absurdity the new, or rather the modernised, doctrine of universal forgiveness.⁴⁰

He went as far as to prophesy the following of Erskine's system:

It is the opening of a flood-gate, which, if not shut by an Omnipotent hand, will inundate our land with heresies of all descriptions; will conduct, by one step, to a denial of the plenary inspiration of Scripture; by another, to Socinian principles, of which, indeed, it already savours; and, eventually, to universal scepticism.⁴¹

Alarmist polemics could not become more blatant than that.

In this connection, the way in which Erskine and company were associated by the orthodox with other persons or movements considered heretical is worth noting. William Hamilton and Robert Burns, for example, both reckoned that Rowites were merely revamped Bereans. Hamilton referred variously to "the Berean hypothesis", "the Berean system", "the Bereans", "the Berean schemes", and openly called Erskine himself "a Berean" and his followers "Modern Bereans";⁴² Burns referred to "the Erskinists" and connected them with "Barclay the Berean".⁴³ John Barclay (1734 - 98) had founded the Berean sect after seceding from the Church of Scotland; the name was taken from the noble Jews of ACTS 17:11, who had searched the Scriptures daily to see whether the apostle Paul's gospel was true. The sect had flourished in Barclay's lifetime,

churches even being established in England, but by the time of the Disruption the English work had died out and only four pastored congregations existed in Scotland, in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee and Laurencekirk. There seems to be no evidence that Erskine had contact with the sect, although it is an interesting fact that Linlathen was on the doorstep of Dundee.

The distinctive doctrines of the Bereans were as follows:

- (i) Everyone who believes the gospel is immediately bound to believe in his own salvation, lack of assurance being incompatible with true faith. The fruits of faith are no basis for assurance. Faith Barclay defined as "the pure passive conviction or persuasion of the truth of God's record" - the Sandemanian view.⁴⁴
- (ii) Scripture alone reveals God. A Barthian before Barth, Barclay rejected general revelation: "natural religion [is] the religion of the devil".⁴⁵
- (iii) The psalms refer exclusively to the experience of Christ, and not that of Christians. Barclay may have been driven to this by his high view of assurance in the Christian life: the psalms not infrequently portray a lack of it.
- (iv) Barclay approved of the use of hymns in public worship as against the normal Scottish practice of exclusive psalmody. He was a prolific poet and versifier of Scripture, producing his own hymnbook, Spiritual Songs.

One can see the similarities between Barclay's conception of faith and assurance and that of Erskine and Campbell, although Campbell seems nearer to Barclay than Erskine does, owing to Erskine's peculiar distinction between assurance of pardon and of salvation, accepting the fruits

of faith as a sign of the latter. William Alexander recognised this in his biography of Ralph Wardlaw, in which he distinguished between Erskine's doctrine of universal pardon and "another set of views which had been recently urged into fresh importance and prominency in Scotland - those relating to the believer's personal assurance of salvation", albeit he felt that the two had "something more than a mere accidental connection, arising out of their being agitated at the same time".⁴⁶ He went on to compare Erskine with Barclay in regard to the unconditionalness of pardon, "with this momentous difference, however, that the one restricts this privilege to the elect while the other extends it to all men."⁴⁷ Barclay had been sound on limited atonement.

Sandemanianism was another convenient accusation to level at Erskine and Campbell since both held that faith was simple mental assent to the truth - although, as we have noted, so did a considerable number of Calvinists untainted by Erskinism, such as Thomas Chalmers himself. Robert Burns brought this charge, and several others combined, against McLeod Campbell:

You protest against being called either a Berean or a Sandemanian; and it is perfectly true, you are neither a Berean nor a Sandemanian; you are neither a Moravian nor an Antinomian. This, however, I will tell you, and with deep lamentation, that you have succeeded in selecting the worst parts of all the four, and in combining them into what the poet would call "a grotesque piece of patchwork". You have the bold unshrinking assurance of the Berean - the simple belief of the Sandemanian; the eternal justification of the followers of Count Zinzendorf, and the substitution of the cross in place of the law as the rule of life, after the manner of the old and new antinomians.⁴⁸

It seems that no theological insult was too painful to

be hurled at the Gareloch school.

Robertson of Greenock and Edward Craig of Edinburgh went one better (or worse?) by comparing the Rowites in their charismatic phase with the then notorious Joanna Southcott. Joanna (1750 - 1814) had been a self-styled prophetess who had held that all would be saved; she founded an exclusive sect on the basis of her alleged heavenly authority, wrote prolifically; and died while supposedly bearing "the second Christ". After her death her followers divided into two camps, one led by John Ward (1781 - 1877) who from 1827 onwards claimed to be a prophet, the other by John Wroe (1782 - 1863) who from 1819 claimed to have an angel guide and to be the recipient of divine visions.⁴⁹ The alleged revival of the gift of prophecy in the person of Mary Campbell made the comparison with Joanna inevitable. Even the Eclectic Review, the religious periodical least critical towards Erskine, drew the parallel in a review of Erskine's Gifts of the Spirit:

Alas for Thomas Erskine! We have ^bseen slow to believe that he too could be the dupe of this new Joanna and her lying miracles ... it is with no other feeling than that of sober sadness that we find such a man prostrated at the shrine of Absurdity.⁵⁰

This quotation introduces us to another prominent feature of the orthodox polemics of 1830: their often unmitigated assault, not merely on Erskine's theology, but on his character, mental balance, and intellectual competence. Josiah Conder pictured Erskine "prostrated at the shrine of Absurdity". Nor was he alone. The Edinburgh Christian Instructor, for example, referred to

that unfortunate intruder into the regions of theology - Mr Thomas Erskine, whose name has sunk into a mere index for whatever is rash, silly, extravagant, and unscriptural in doctrinal statement.⁵¹

"Unscriptural" is the last of the pejorative epithets: "rash, silly, extravagant" precede, and are judgments of personality, not doctrine. The Instructor continued:

If ever we have any hopes of Mr. Erskine's recovery from delusion, since he speculated and raved on universal pardon and its cognate heresies, they are now gone; for he believes in the gift of tongues having been conferred on certain ship carpenters in Port Glasgow, and a feverish damsel or two in Dumbartonshire. Of these we can only say that if they are not full of trickery, they are full of folly - that if they should not be condemned for their impious pretensions, they should be pitied for their insane illusions, and looked after by their friends. ⁵²

Calvinistic hostility to the charismatic manifestations at the Gareloch spilled over into contempt for Erskine for having been "deluded" by them. As Dr. Thomson himself remarked regarding the manifestations, "such insults on our religion and on our common sense neither deserve, nor shall receive, any quarter".⁵³ Similar sentiments applied to Erskine, and as the laird of Linlathen had given no quarter to orthodoxy in his latest two publications, so he received none in return, not even from the Eclectic Review.

Craig of Edinburgh spoke of Erskine's "perversion of mind". Robertson of Greenock carried on the attack, addressing Erskine directly thus:

I regard you as a restless spirit in Theology, and the rapid march of error which you have made since the publication of your first work, is almost unparalleled, and renders it difficult to determine where you may end in your future publications. ⁵⁴

"Restless spirit" is another judgment of personality.

Erskine's most hard-hitting opponent, however, was Andrew Thomson, whose Doctrine of Universal Pardon Considered and Refuted was aimed entirely and exclusively at Erskine's Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel and Introductory Essay to Extracts of Letters to a Christian Lady. With respect to Erskine's character, Thomson charged him with the sin of overweening arrogance, especially in the spirit displayed in his Introductory Essay, with its sweeping and magisterial condemnations of Scottish Evangelicalism. Thomson referred to "Mr. Erskine's great dogmatism", "uncharitableness", "wrathful declamation" and "narrow-minded bigotry".⁵⁵ He reprobated what he saw as Erskine's assumption of "vatican-like authority",⁵⁶ observing ruefully that the Freeness "seemed to be used as a sort of text book, by the supporters of his dogmas"⁵⁷ - an interesting glimpse of the more popular impact of Erskine's most controversial treatise. Regarding Erskine's mental balance, Thomson averred that

he is ever and anon indulging in fancies and conjectures, and puts forth absurdity and sense with equal gravity, when it comports with his main doctrine.⁵⁸

He continued in the same vein:

Mr. Erskine's love of theory is remarkably strong, and pervades his whole writings. He absolutely revels in conjecture. Plain truth lies before him; but he turns aside to feast on hypothesis. And the truth, when he does embrace it, is so mixed up with the hypothesis, that the inattentive or ignorant reader believes what he should reject, and rejects what he should believe.⁵⁹

This was really just another way of making the point Chalmers made about Erskine's imagination overbearing his other faculties.

As to Erskine's intellectual competence as Biblical exegete and theologian, Thomson exhibited no doubts and pulled no punches. Erskine was "a most arbitrary commentator, and a most unsafe guide to the Holy Scriptures".⁶⁰

Erskine's exegesis in particular fell unmercifully under Thomson's lash:

it is curious to observe how plastic the language of Scripture is in the hands of Mr. Erskine. No matter whether it be Greek or English, he puts it into his critical crucible, and by a strange sort of process, it comes forth whatsoever he is pleased to make it. ⁶¹

Erskine, he lamented, was

a perfect Proteus in his travels through the Bible, and [someone] whom it is impossible to fix down for any length of time even to a Confession of his own making. ⁶²

As for Erskine's books:

were it not for the strain of piety which pervades his books, and which seems to break forth most ardently when scriptural statement and common sense are most grossly violated, we are confident his books would be thrown away in dislike by nine-tenths of those who begin to peruse them, and with a feeling of wonder that any one should be imposed upon by such fanciful and outre divinity. ⁶³

Thomson has attracted something of a reputation for fire-eating words. But he said no more in substance than the mild-mannered Ralph Wardlaw, who wrote what was probably the most sustained and devastating critique of Erskine to emerge from the orthodox camp in 1830. It was all the more biting in that Wardlaw himself was well to the left of Calvinistic orthodoxy, believing in a moral government interpretation of the atonement which was in accord with Erskine's views on the universal extent of Christ's sin-bearing. Perhaps Wardlaw felt that Erskine's objectionable position was sufficiently similar to his own to reflect discredit even on a reasonable and enlightened moral government theology - guilt by association, as it were - unless he, Wardlaw, could publicly distance himself from the radical aberrations of universal pardon. Whatever his motives, Wardlaw took up his pen and produced Two Essays: (I) On the Assurance of Faith (2) On the Extent of the Atonement and Universal Pardon.

Like Thomson's work, Wardlaw's essays were directed specifically against Erskine's Freeness and Introductory Essay. He relentlessly attacked their leading doctrines, universal pardon and the assurance thereof as the essence of faith, although conceding against Westminster Calvinism that Christ did die for all men, in an Amyraldian fashion. Interestingly, and perhaps significantly, Wardlaw linked Erskine's doctrine of assurance with the name of Cesar Malan, a connection we have observed a number of times already. He quoted from Malan's The Assurance of Faith from God to His Elect, or the New Bartimaeus to illustrate the false doctrine that assurance belongs to the essence of faith, and attacked Malan elsewhere in the treatise.⁶⁴ He also quoted and attacked Barclay the Berean for similar views as to the necessity of assurance to true faith.⁶⁵

Wardlaw's criticisms of Erskine himself were pointed indeed. Regarding Erskine's assault on Scottish religion,

Wardlaw expressed the opinion that "his censures have appeared to me reprehensibly indiscriminate".⁶⁶ Then he delivered what if Erskine read it he must have felt to be a startling and painful apostrophe:

I think you in error; and no error can be entirely sinless. Your error seems in part to have originated in a too exclusive contemplation of the love of the divine character, along with a misconception and partial view of its nature and exercise, in relation to the other attributes of Deity. You have been so captivated with the lovely, that you have forgotten the awful. It is my prayer, that the Spirit of God may bring you back from this wandering; give you to look at the whole of the divine character anew, as it appears in the lessons of the Cross; to see the awfulness of the lovely, and the loveliness of the awful, - the two united inspiring affectionate fear and reverential love; - and that He may graciously grant you repentance, to the acknowledging of the truth! ⁶⁷

Wardlaw also had strong words of Erskine's friends and colleagues - Campbell, Irving et al. He thought them arrogant and dogmatic:

There is a style of dictatorial loftiness, and of almost inspired decision, which has been adopted by some of the abettors of the doctrines examined in the Essays, and by some too of the modern millenarian "school of the prophets," such as no man has had any title to assume, since the "vision and the prophecy were sealed up" in Patmos; and which is as offensive to good taste, as it is inconsistent with the humility of a disciple of Jesus. Away with it.⁶⁸

He was "convinced of their good intentions", he said, but

equally convinced that they are under the power of a strange delusion; that they are attaching Scriptural authority to error;

and that their doctrine, instead of winning the world to God, is really fitted to give licence and audacity to error. 69

So much for the voice of the moral government school, which was nearest to Erskine, yet no less hotly antagonistic to his distinctive doctrines.

We must pause to ask the question: why did the orthodox and even the not-quite-so-orthodox Evangelicals display such hostility to Erskine and McLeod Campbell? The question is no simple one. It is matched by the question why Erskine and Campbell displayed such a self-confident and denunciatory antagonism towards the orthodox. The polarised mind, as we have already stated, was equally manifest on both sides. One clue may lie in the atmosphere of the times - a vague enough concept, but a reality nevertheless. David Newsome describes the phenomenon well:

the decades which followed the close of the Napoleonic wars were a period of great unsettlement and alarm. There was an intense consciousness of a rapid movement forward in every department of human activity, not only in speculation and learning, but also - perhaps more frightening - in technology and in the ability of man to conquer nature and thereby to increase the material comforts of life ... In short, the whole ethos of the times was dynamic. Expressions of fear and hope, often curiously intermingled, were common to reformer and reactionary. All were fired by a sense of urgency. Something must be done now, or else the opportunity will be irretrievably lost. Tomorrow may be too late. 70

Newsome was trying to explain the Oxford Movement, but his analysis seems just as relevant to the Row Movement.

Marcus Dods, the learned antagonist of Edward Irving, gave vent to the feelings Newsome describes in his anti-Irvingite tome on the incarnation:

we live in most eventful times. The elements of some mighty movement have, for some years, been gathering around us with unexampled rapidity. The ancient bonds of society seem to be worn out, and bursting asunder. The old despotisms appear to be crumbling to dust, together with the superstition on which they lean; while the present aspect of society promises to substitute in their room nothing better than liberalism allied with infidelity ...⁷¹

McLeod Campbell expressed a disgusted awareness of the growth of revolutionary political sentiments:

I see nothing in all this spirit of radicalism and liberalism, but the deification of self, and the desire of the people to be their own gods. ⁷²

Edward Irving turned his guns on the whole British ecclesiastical scene:

I know well enough the schismatical temper of the church to believe that it is ready for anything. I saw and marked its ripeness for revolt from truth by the way in which the Bible-society controversy was conducted on both sides. In Scotland there is the spirit of schism, in England there is the spirit of expediency. ⁷³

The comparison with the apocrypha controversy is an interesting one, for that certainly was conducted with much vehemence by all concerned, and was still raging when the Row controversy broke out. Perhaps some spill-over of aggressive feeling from the one to the other occurred,

or both may well have been manifestations of the same mood of restless and urgent energy. These, after all, were the unsettled years of political reform in Britain; 1831 was to witness the outbreak of popular riots in Edinburgh during the general election, when it was announced that the Tory, Henry Dundas, had defeated his Liberal opponent. Did the same spirit which provoked riots in the city provoke controversial passion in the church?

One further point in this connection is the hardening of traditional Protestant attitudes which was brought about in Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century by the growth of Roman Catholicism in this country. Samuel Taylor Coleridge noted this in his Aids to Reflection, published in 1825, observing that "Popery is rushing in on us like an inundation".⁷⁴ In Scotland this took the form of an influx of Irish Roman Catholic immigrants, which according to Drummond and Bulloch was partly responsible for an "increasing dogmatism" among Scottish Evangelicals.⁷⁵ They also speak of a "renaissance of dogmatic Calvinism".⁷⁶ This may help to account for the ardour with which Calvinistic orthodoxy hurled itself against Erskine and Campbell, although it does not illuminate the equivalent ardour of Erskine and Campbell in their proclamations of "perfervid heterodoxy".⁷⁷

We will round off this section by looking at the ironic fashion in which Erskine's enemies themselves pointed the way forward for Erskine's theology towards his mature Universalism. Of course, it could be argued that it was merely good alarmist tactics to predict that such opinions as Erskine held would necessarily lead him to abandon the doctrine of final judgment altogether; but in view of the fact that this is what actually happened, one feels some hesitation in accusing the orthodox of

mere alarmism. Robertson of Greenock uttered one such typical warning to Erskine:

You sing ever of mercy, but seldom of judgment, and in a way so unlike the Bible, that I know not if you have made up your opinions on God's character as a lawgiver, or on the nature and duration of future punishment. ⁷⁸

Hamilton of Strathblane uttered another, regarding Rowites in general:

These will not long rest at the notions of universal pardon and redemption: but, like their predecessors, boldly advance to all the awful but legitimate consequences of the system, universal salvation ... ⁷⁹

Smyth of Glasgow went into more detail:

If "there is nothing but love in God", and if His affection is universal, there cannot be an election according to grace, either as to temporal or spiritual blessings. All must be light, and liberty, and joy. Earth must resemble heaven, or rather heaven must be everywhere. No longer shall we hear of apostate spirits "reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day:" hell is a phantasy of the deluded creature's brain; and all is happiness, because all is love. That such conclusions are strictly deducible from the scheme of universal pardon, is as plain as any proposition in Euclid, and it is wonderful that they should not be at once perceived and admitted.

... the doctrine of universal pardon unavoidably leads to that of universal salvation.

Here, it is proper to remind the reader, that we speak of the tendency of the scheme, and not of the present belief of its advocates, who, although evidently perplexed with the doctrine of future punishment, have not

yet directly impugned it. It deserves attention, that wherever reference is made to human misery as the result of sin, in modern treatises on the subject of universal pardon, there is almost a total avoidance of the language of Scripture regarding it: that, in hardly a single instance, is the idea of direct divine infliction brought prominently into view.⁸⁰

Thomas Chalmers made similar remarks, quoted in chapter III, section (iii).

Probing beneath this, several writers thought that the understanding of God's moral attributes entertained by Erskine and his circle was fundamentally flawed. They had elevated God's love into a false and unScriptural position of dominance over His holiness and justice, or indeed had simply expunged the latter out of God's character altogether by merging and losing them in His love. Burns of Paisley, for instance, addressed McLeod Campbell thus:

You have repeatedly told me that our differences of sentiment are occasioned entirely by the different views we entertain of the nature of holiness; and I verily believe it. The holiness which you inculcate appears to be merely love ...⁸¹

Andrew Thomson passed an analogous verdict:

A greater snare cannot be laid for your piety and your judgment, than that which consists in making love His paramount or His only perfection. For whenever there is a consciousness of guilt, and a dread of responsibility, it must be comfortable to have a God Who is divested of all that is frowning and indignant towards transgressors and clothed with all that is compassionate and kind.

And whenever there is a soft or a sentimental temperament at work, that representation of the Divine nature must be peculiarly pleasing and acceptable. ⁸²

Thomson felt that the Rowites had totally misunderstood the nature of God's love, for "they have it settled in their own minds that God must have compassion and mercy upon all", whereas no such necessity existed in the relation between God and sinners. ⁸³ Thomson pointed to ROM. 9:15 and 18, where God's mercy is represented as discretionary and optional in its exercise toward the guilty: God has mercy on whom He pleases and leaves in sin whom He pleases. In other words, the moral structure of divine goodness excludes the necessary expression of mercy to the sinful. As Thomson argued, God never says He will be just to whom He will, and to whom He will He is unjust; or that He will be truthful to whom He will, and to whom He will He tells lies. But He does say He will have mercy on whom He will, and whom He will He hardens. ⁸⁴

It could be retorted against Thomson that this is simply reversing Erskine's order, and setting justice higher than love in God's character - that God must punish, but need not show mercy. Not all Calvinists have accepted that retributive justice is essential to God's character, but mainstream Calvinism has accepted this, and has therefore held that in the relationship of God and sinners punishment is necessary but mercy optional. God's moral character requires that sinners be punished, either in their own persons or in the divine Substitute, but it does not require that sinners be redeemed, else all would be redeemed. But does this make justice "higher" than love in God? The term "higher" is questionable. Love as a sentiment is of the very essence of God's moral

being; so is justice. Neither is higher than the other in the sense that each is a fundamental element in the divine character. However, once men have sinned, justice positively requires that God's law be vindicated against those who have transgressed it, whereas love by no means positively requires that the transgressors be pardoned. Love may prompt but cannot demand forgiveness; God the Sovereign is free to act on that prompting or not, as He sees fit. The divine decision to save sinners, therefore, was not necessary, but a free and optional act on the part of God. So, although love is necessary as a constituent moral feeling of God's character, its salvific expression in the context of sin is not necessary but discretionary. Even if God had decided to save no sinners at all, that would not have been inconsistent with the existence of love in His character; it would mean only that He had permitted His desire to express that love to be countervailed by the need to vindicate the majesty of His holiness. In short, the glory of His own being, rather than His creatures' well-being, is God's supreme consideration, as it is also that of every holy creature.⁸⁵

Finally, we must allow Ralph Wardlaw to speak to this subject, once more reminding ourselves that he of all people ought to have shown some sympathy for Erskine's doctrine. Yet we find him arguing along the same lines as Dr. Thomson:

There has been abstract reasoning as to what seems most befitting the character of Deity, - especially the love in which that character is at times summed up; and on this view of the case, many sentiments have been introduced, in the way of illustration, distinguished both by their loftiness and their beauty, and invested with a charm of pure and fervent devotion, peculiarly fascinating to minds at all predisposed to what is spiritual, and from which others too may derive

the benefit of an awakening impulse; sentiments, such as may fill the believer's eye, in the reading of them, with the tear of sympathetic delight, and draw from his very heart the sigh of regret that they should be associated with any misapprehensions of the truth. - There has been much too of appeal to feeling. The abettors of the particular views which we are about to discuss tell all with whom they converse, of the wonderful effect of their new principles in inspiring and expanding their hearts with love, - love to God, such as they never before experienced, and which they are sure no other views of the truth have ever produced; and there appears at times so much of sincerity and earnestness in their representations, accompanied with a desire so seemingly or really benevolent (for there may not infrequently be an alloy of less noble feelings) to bring others to the happy participation of the same experience; that the passions of some are wrought upon, and by that means their judgments misled into a too hasty acquiescence. - And there has, moreover, been not a little of a fond and eager pressing of the novel views upon the attention of unbelievers, as being calculated to diminish the prejudices of the natural mind against the gospel, and, by taking off from its obnoxiousness, and rendering it less repulsive and stern than the more common exhibitions of it are conceived to be, to persuade to its acceptance. But this, to say the least of it, is a very hazardous experiment. There is imminent danger of divesting the gospel of some attribute as essential to it as its grace, in order to lessen the aversion of the carnal mind to its provisions; and, by a sort of specious sentimentalism, stripping the Almighty of the awful in His character to give effect to the more attractive; hiding His justice, to recommend His grace; instead of employing the "terrors of the Lord" to persuade men, keeping them out of sight; dwelling much on the love, and little on the light, of God's moral nature; and by - I know not what to call it - a kind of ultra tenderness, that would fain be more compassionate than He whose compassions are infinite - urging and almost cajoling poor sinners to the belief that God has already pardoned them, when the Bible testimony is, that "God is angry

with them every day". 86

Wardlaw accused Erskine's system of having

the appearance at least of a greater concern about holding out encouragement to the sinner, than about maintaining the glory of God; more of tenderness to the traitor, than of faithful loyalty to the Sovereign; more of pity than of piety.⁸⁷

He continued, speaking of Rowites in general:

the charge is, not that they make too much of His love, that they make too little of His wrath; not too much of His promises, but too little of His threatenings; not too much of His smiles, but too little of His frowns; not too much of the attractive and encouraging, but too little of the alarming and awful ... They say to believers, "Behold the goodness of God." The apostles say, "Behold the goodness and severity of God."⁸⁸

But Erskine and company did not heed such admonitions. The Row controversy, under some mysterious, feverish impetus of its own, marched onward into 1831 and final disaster.

(vi) "The Brazen Serpent"

The final year of the Row controversy opened with a series of ominous events in London involving A.J. Scott. We noted previously his withdrawal of his ordination application in October 1830 on the grounds of his disagreement

with the Westminster Confession over limited atonement, the Sabbath and the theology of ordination itself. In spite of this, in January 1831 the Scottish church in Woolwich reissued its invitation to Scott to become its minister, and Scott accepted the invitation. He had not changed his mind on any of the controverted points; both the call and his acceptance of it were acts of deliberate and provocative ecclesiastical brinkmanship.

Edward Irving appears to have been the inspiration behind Scott's part in this rashness. According to Scott,

He [Irving] conceived that I ought not to anticipate the actual decision of the Church - to assume myself cut off from her communion by an act of my own without her express sentence. In compliance with his desire I agreed with the Presbytery of London that a reference should be made to the Scotch Presbytery¹ [Paisley] which had conferred my licence.

Irving persuaded Scott to accept the call and then to wait and see what the Church would do about it. Since Scott openly disagreed with the Westminster Confession at three important points, this amounted to a challenge to the Church of Scotland as to whether it was prepared to stand by the Confession or to tolerate those who publicly dissented from it. The Church of Scotland had, of course, tolerated at least private dissent from the Confession on the part of its more liberally and rationalistically inclined Moderates during that party's domination of the Kirk, or at least of its General Assembly. But the Moderates were no longer as dominant as they had been in the previous century, their strength now being seriously challenged by the growing Evangelical party. The Evangelicals, however, were at this stage certainly neither powerful nor intemperate enough to attempt a destructive

and bloody purge from the Kirk of all Moderates; and besides, there had been a spirit of reconciliation between the two parties over the previous decade in common defence of the Kirk against anti-Establishment Dissent.² It is even debatable to what extent the two parties now differed over the theology of the Westminster Confession; George Hill, leader of the Moderates until his death in 1819, had (we recall) been Calvinistic in doctrine, as evidenced by his Lectures in Divinity. At any rate, neither party had any liking for men like Scott and Campbell, whose spirit of novelty and enthusiasm fitted into neither camp. (Campbell had positively boasted that he belonged to neither camp). Scott's defiance of the Confession was in any case not quiet and private, but open and resolute. The acceptance by Scott of the Woolwich congregation's call, therefore, was very much in the nature of a quixotic gauntlet flung down before Evangelicals and Moderates alike, daring them, as it were, to unite in disciplining him. He was to have his wish. The Moderator of the London presbytery remonstrated with the elders of the Woolwich congregation, to no effect, and London presbytery decided to refer the case to the presbytery of Paisley which had licensed Scott in 1827. Scott seemed happy with this, and the trial was fixed for May.

Irving had been behaving in a somewhat flamboyant and high-handed way for a number of months. When Scott had first withdrawn his ordination application the previous October, Irving had tried to intervene on his behalf, and ended up advising that if all else failed the Woolwich congregation should ordain Scott independently - in effect, to enact a schism from the Church of Scotland. A little later in December 1830, Irving had stormed out of a meeting of the London presbytery when one of its members had initiated heresy proceedings against him in regard to

his Christology, proclaiming that he was not subject to their jurisdiction since the trust deeds of his church required him to be ordained by a Scottish presbytery. The London presbytery tried Irving in his absence, condemned his writings, and excommunicated him from their number. In such a charged atmosphere it is not entirely surprising that Irving should have advised Scott to accept the call from the Woolwich congregation, braving the discipline of the Kirk.

In February, Erskine's latest literary offering to the religious public rolled from the presses, entitled The Brazen Serpent. It was the most theologically radical and innovatory thing he had yet written, since its central conception was a thorough-going rejection of the orthodox Calvinistic doctrine of penal substitution as a correct understanding of the atonement. With this, Erskine had well and truly crossed the dogmatic Rubicon and broken with the whole Evangelical tradition. Relinquishing forensic for organic imagery, Erskine replaced substitution with the concept of headship:

I believe that the Spirit of God has made this view of the atonement [penal substitution] spirit and life to many souls - and yet I believe that with some truth in it it is a very defective view, to say the least of it. This view of the atonement which is generally known by the name of the doctrine of Christ's substitution, has I know been held by many living members of His body - and yet I believe that with some truth in it, it contains much dangerous error. In the first place I may observe that it would not be considered justice in an earthly judge, were he to accept the offered sufferings of an innocent person as a satisfaction for the lawful punishment of a guilty person ... The humanly devised doctrine of substitution has come in place of and has cast out the true doctrine of the Headship of Christ, which is the large, and glorious, and true explanation of those passages of Scripture which are commonly interpreted

as teaching substitution. Christ died for every man as the Head of every man - not by any fiction of law, not in a conventional way, but in reality as the Head of the whole mass of the human nature, which, although composed of many members, is one thing, one body, in every³ part of which the Head is truly present.³

Human nature, Erskine now maintains, is one single generic reality in which individuals merely participate; Christ is the new organic head of this inclusive nature, as Adam was the old.

The Bible speaks of the human nature as being the unfolding of Adam, just as an oak is the unfolding of an acorn.⁴

We are all of one flesh, but we are kept separate and walled off from each other by our being individual persons. This individual personality gives us that feeling of distinct responsibility which in a great measure detaches us from the actions of others as if we had nothing to do with them. But Jesus had no human personality, He had the human nature under the personality of the Son of God. And so His human nature was more open to the commonness of man, for the divine personality, whilst it separated Him from sinners in point of sin, united Him to them in love. And thus the sins of other men were to Jesus what the affections and lusts of his own particular flesh are to each individual believer. Every man was a part of Him, and He felt the sins of every man, just as the new nature in every believer feels the sins of the old nature with which it is connected, not in sympathy, but in sorrow and abhorrence.⁵

But, reader, you start at this, as if it were rather to be desired or wondered at, than to be believed as an actual fact. Yet only consider, we are assured in the fifth chapter of the Romans, and fifteenth of 1st Corinthians, that Jesus Christ came into Adam's place - actually into that place

which Adam held in relation to us - into the root of the nature - well - is Adam in you or not? Yes, most assuredly he is. Adam is in every man, just because every man is a mere unfolding of Adam, as the branch of a tree is a mere unfolding of the seed out of which the tree sprung. Adam is in you. Well, Christ is in you also, for He came into Adam's place. And as the condemnation which came by Adam, even sorrow and death, is upon you - so also is the blessing which came by Christ upon you, even the favour of God and the non-imputation of sin, which if believed are life eternal.⁶

Erskine's Irvingite Christology comes into play here. Since the organic entity "human nature" is fallen through the sin of its first head, it follows that the incarnation of the Logos brings Him into participation in that fallen humanity, there being no other humanity for Him to share. Erskine proclaims this doctrine with uninhibited fervour:

This is the gospel - this is that great truth of the fallen humanity of Jesus ... I do not wonder that Christianity withered away when this glorious truth was let slip. It contains all - the universal love of God, and the atonement for every man, as the ground of personal assurance and the indwelling of the Spirit; and it contains also the personal glorious advent and reign of Jesus Christ upon this earth, because it connects Him by an eternal bond with the very substance of this earth. Blessed be God for having again revived it before the end come.⁷

It is because Christ is the head of a fallen humanity that He suffers the penalty of death denounced against sin. Not that Erskine understands punishment as retributive; he now clearly articulates what has long lain beneath the surface of his mind, that punishment is re-formative in its intention. The punishment of God on

sinners is not at all a curse, but a blessing.

All the Bible is full of proof that punishment in this present dispensation is sent as a blessing ... There is something to be done by penal suffering which cannot be done without it. It is not a ceremony, it belongs to the eternal constitution of things. It is the refiner's fire, without which the refining cannot take place.⁸

But as regards the offender, what is the purpose of the punishment? Is it not that by sufferings felt to flow from the breach of the law, he should be taught the intrinsic excellence and value as well as the authority of the law, and should thus learn to estimate it more highly and cleave to it more and love it and hate what opposes it?⁹

The sufferings of divine punishment are intended to purify man of his sinfulness by connecting sin with misery in human experience. Man's duty is to submit to this punitive process as something wholly salutary, sent upon him by the gracious love of his Creator. Unfortunately, however, man is unable thus to submit until he is first taught that the whole painful process really does spring from God's love; for unless man knows that God is his friend, he will interpret providential suffering as the inflictions of an enemy. For this reason the Son of God became man, in order to prove to sinful men that God loves them and that His love lies behind His punitive providence. Christ proved this by Himself submitting to God's punishment as the Head of sinful mankind, particularly to death itself, and then rising from the dead in a new and glorious mode of life. Sinners are thus shown that if only they too will submit, as Jesus did, they too will rise to new life.

A sick man might as well have a friend to take his medicine for him, as a sinner have

a Saviour to take his suffering for him ... But if Jesus did not suffer punishment to dispense with our suffering it, what has He accomplished for us by suffering for us?¹⁰

He did not suffer the punishment of sin, as the doctrine of substitution supposes, to dispense with our suffering it, but to change the character of our suffering, from an unsanctified and unsanctifying suffering into a sanctified and sanctifying suffering.¹¹

Now this is the great thing which Christ has accomplished for us by suffering for us; He has become a Head of a new and uncondemned life to every man, in the light of which we may see God's love in the law and in the punishment, and may thus suffer to the glory of God and draw out from the suffering that blessing which is contained in it.¹²

Although Erskine has rejected penal substitution, he employs the concept of Christ's headship to similar effect when he maintains that it is only because of Christ's death that God can righteously provide eternal life in Christ for sinful men. Speaking of Christ's assumption of human nature, he says:

He came into it as a new head, that He might take it out of the fall, and redeem it from sin, and lift it up to God; and this could be effected only through sorrow and death, manifesting the character of God, and the character of man's rebellion; manifesting God's abhorrence to sin, and the full sympathy of the new Head of the nature in that abhorrence, and thus eating out the taint of the fall, and making honourable way for the inpouring of the new life into the rebellious body. Because thus only could there be an open vindication given of the holiness and truth of God, against which the fall was an offence; and thus

only could it become a righteous thing in God, in consideration of this new Head of the nature - who had, in that nature, and in spite of its opposite tendencies, vindicated the character of God, and fulfilled all righteousness, to declare the race partaking of that nature forgiven, and to lay up in Him, their glorious Head, eternal life for them all, which should flow into each member, just as He believed in the holy love of God which was manifested in the gift and work of Christ. 13

Christ's submissive holy suffering on the cross as the head of all men has made an "honourable way for the in-pouring of the new life into the rebellious body"; it is therefore now "a righteous thing in God", says Erskine, "to declare the race forgiven" and to lay up in Christ eternal life for all members of the race. Erskine's idea is that it would have been dishonourable and unrighteous for God to supply such benefits to sinners, if they in the person of their head had not submitted to the divine penalty on sin in a spirit of cooperation and acceptance. Fallen men, left to themselves, would not be able in their own strength thus to submit to a purifying punitive process; they would be fit only for final judgment and destruction. But Christ has submitted as the representative head of the body of fallen mankind; therefore mankind has been granted, as it were, a stay of execution, during which sinners may, with Christ's help as the indwelling enabler, submit as He submitted and be purified thereby of their fallenness. This "stay of execution" is what Erskine means by "forgiveness" and "non-imputation of sin".

The essence of the atonement according to Erskine, then, is that Christ suffered God's reformatory penalties in the right spirit, a spirit of submission and acceptance, confessing the goodness of God in thus punishing that

sinful humanity of which He was head, so that it has become a righteous and honourable thing in God to restore sinful men - which is basically the doctrine of vicarious repentance, popularised by McLeod Campbell in his later book on the atonement in 1856. By thus suffering, Christ purified and refined the fallen nature He had assumed, bringing it into conformity with God's holy will. The risen and glorified Christ is now able to communicate His new life to sinners, empowering them to follow in His footsteps in accepting God's punishment as He Himself did, so that they too might pass through the refining process to eternal life, after the pioneering pattern of their Head.

The sinful fallen nature could only be restored through penal sufferings received in the spirit of holy love, which is just the eternal uncondemned life of God. That life was in the Word, and the Word was made flesh ... Throughout the whole course of His life on earth, Christ was just accepting His punishment as the Head of the sinful nature; and that eternal life which His believing members receive out of Him is continually doing in them what it did in Him. Christ suffered then for a purpose directly opposed to the purpose which is implied in the doctrine of substitution, He suffered not to dispense with our suffering, but to enable us to suffer as He did, to the glory of God and to the purification of our natures. And here then is the simple connexion between the atonement of Christ and the sanctification of His members. The atonement consisted in Christ's accepting the punishment of sin as the Head of the nature; and the sanctification of His members consists in their accepting it also in the power of His Spirit dwelling in them. 14

As can be seen, the work of Christ in Erskine's new understanding has a strong exemplarist emphasis. Christ has not done or suffered something for sinners in order to

free them from having to do or suffer it (as in penal substitution); rather, He has set the perfect example of what God wishes all men to do themselves, viz. to accept providential suffering in a spirit of confidence toward Himself, as a means of spiritual purification, the result being a glorious resurrection into a new and immortal life. Christ indeed is the One who enables sinners to do this, to follow His example; but the important point is that sinners are helped to do the same thing that Christ did. Manifestly, then, the whole complex of ideas which clusters around the doctrine of substitutionary atonement has been jettisoned by Erskine in favour of a model of soteriology which is much more exemplarist in tone.

Erskine may well have been assisted towards this understanding of the atonement by the writings of Irving, who himself was unsympathetic to penal substitution. Irving attacked the traditional Evangelical understanding of atonement a number of times; for instance:

I must declare that I love not the carnal estimate of Christ's visible sufferings as a man and of His death as a man, save only as they give heart to His disciples passing through the same scenes of trial and show us the reality of His passive manhood. But as the measure of what all His elect would have had to suffer through all eternity and a set-off against this in the way of barter or exchange, I must confess it appears to me a poor, petty, dishonourable, insufficient view of the matter, which the thinnest witted Socinian will blow to atoms by a breath.¹⁵

In place of this, Irving preferred to see the atonement as the moral reconciliation of holy Godhead with fallen manhood in the theanthropic person of Christ:

How shall human nature in the fallen state be brought to be in harmony with the acting of the holy Godhead? Ever since the fall God and man have been at variance. The thing was not that ever the human will had acted in harmony with the will Divine; and how then is it now to be? How is a human nature to respond truly and justly in all things to a Divine nature? This is the reconciliation of which so much is made mention in Scripture. This is the atonement of which they Evangelicals make so much discourse, without knowing what they say or whereof they affirm. Atonement is not reparation, is not the cost or damage, but the being at one. It should be pronounced at-one-ment. What are the two things to be brought at one? Are they not God and sinful fallen man? And where are they to be brought at one but in the person of Christ where we have them now brought together without any original sin?¹⁶

This is broadly similar to Erskine's new doctrine.

But how does Christ communicate to sinners this power of His own obedient life in order to enable them to follow in His footsteps? Erskine here elaborates on an idea which he had encountered in William Law during his second continental vacation, namely the idea that Christ is in all men, that the new life has already been planted in the hearts of all men and needs only to be recognised and exercised.

Being as the Head and root of the race, He is in every man as the root of a tree is by its fibres in every branch and twig that grows from it. The fibre of that root is in every man, is the cord of a man and the band of love wherewith God draws him. This is the meaning of Christ being called "the second Adam". And this is the meaning of that word also, "the head of every man is Christ." And this is that gospel which Paul was commissioned to preach amongst the Gentiles, "Christ in you (yea in every man) the hope of glory".¹⁷

You [the finally impenitent] shall be judged not merely as one who is dead in sin, but as one who is wilfully dead, when he had life given him. "Christ in us" is the pound given to every man, and he who wraps it in a napkin shall when the time of judgment comes be condemned for having done so. It was this in him which put it in his power to be no longer under the dominion of sin - and he has made the pound of none effect by his unbelief.¹⁸

God has given life to all men in Christ the Head of all men, and it is in the power supplied by this life, flowing from the Head to His members, that men are called upon to exercise saving faith and repentance. As well as reflecting the mysticism of Law, this is reminiscent of the Wesleyan doctrine of "sufficient grace", according to which the atonement communicates to all men the ability to repent and believe, although it is up to them whether they make use of that ability.

The fusion of the natural and supernatural is now more pronounced than ever in Erskine's theology. The gap between the saving work of Christ and human spiritual endeavour has been almost obliterated; Christ is but the pioneer of a divine process which all men must undergo, rather than one who rescues men from the necessity of having to atone for their own sins. The community of experience between Saviour and saved is thus magnified to the point of virtual identity. Similarly, the distinction between saved and unsaved has been subjected to radical erosion, in that Christ is now seen as being in all men, and God's dealings with men at the individual and personal level are seen as being indiscriminately redemptive in character. The only difference left between one man and another is that some men wake up to what God and Christ are doing in all men and cooperate with the

process, whereas others do not. That religious duality which at the vertical level has traditionally been erected between Creator and creature, Saviour and saved, and which at the horizontal level has been expressed by such contrasts as wrath/grace, condemnation/justification, unregenerate/regenerate, natural man/spiritual man, etc., has undergone a very striking if by no means total dissolution at Erskine's hands. Only one serious theological obstacle remained: the doctrine of unconditional election, that most celebrated or notorious hallmark of Calvinism. If Christ is in all men, if all men have the potency of His life in their souls, if God's providence is a universally redemptive process, where is that discrimination between man and man which signifies God's electing and predestinating grace?

The answer seems to be that Erskine weaves a most impenetrable fog around this point. One would have thought that his insistence on the sameness of the relationship between Christ and all men, on the organic nature of humanity under its one redeeming Head, would have led him to abandon a doctrine whose raison d'être is to articulate an immutable and divine distinction among men. Yet paradoxically, the doctrine of election appears in the Brazen Serpent, as it had appeared in The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel, jostling uncomfortably with a crowd of assertions which sought to wipe out any inequality or discrimination in God's relations with sinners. Erskine's process of theological maturation was evidently not yet complete, although in less than two years he would finally repudiate this last lingering remnant of Calvinistic dualism. For the moment, however, his sentiments were as follows:

The desire of the Spirit is to penetrate and quicken the whole mass of the human nature, even as the sap of a tree seeks to penetrate and quicken the whole mass of the

tree. But within the limits of this general desire, the Spirit has a special charge, marked out for Him by the sovereign election of God, and that is the cleansing and sanctifying from out of the human nature a temple for the Lord, a body for Christ. ¹⁹

Now wherein did his [Noah's] election consist? It consisted simply in this - that he was made to know the truth of a thing, which was as true to every individual that perished, as it was to him - he was made to know that God would bring a flood upon the earth for its wickedness, but that He willed not the death of the wicked - He willed not that any should perish but that all should go into the ark and live. He was appointed to be the preacher of these tidings, and by preaching them he condemned the world that refused to hear. If the ark had not been as free to all as to him, his preaching could not have condemned them ... Now Abraham is the full type of the election. He was the first person to whom, as the head of a separate family and as the representative of only a part of the world, the great promise was made. This is a very important thing, for we are hereby taught wherein the election consists and wherein it does not consist. And God has been very gracious in this matter, for this same Abraham who is set forth as the type of election, is also set forth as the pattern of believers, whereby we are taught that all men have a right to believe and ought to believe what Abraham believed, and thus that the difference between the elect and the unelect does not consist in the one being loved and forgiven in Christ and the other not; but in the one being taught by God to believe this forgiving love, and the other being permitted to put it from them. Men are elected not to the shedding of the blood but to the sprinkling of the blood, which means the purging of the conscience through faith in the atonement. ²⁰

Erskine thus paradoxically continues to hold a Calvinistic doctrine of election in this otherwise unCalvinistic work.

We have now examined the main doctrinal themes of the Brazen Serpent, and seen its serious departure from the parameters of traditional Evangelical theology as respects the nature of atonement and salvation. Before moving on, however, there are other elements in the book at which we ought more briefly to look.

In the first place, Erskine's tremulous sense of eschatological imminence breaks forth more audaciously in this treatise than anywhere else in his writings, before or after. This was intimately connected with his belief in the authenticity of the Gareloch manifestations which he felt heralded Christ's return - the so-called "latter day rain" theory of the charismata, based on JOEL chapter two. With reference to the last day and the charismata, Erskine had such things to say as this:

And that day is near, it hasteth greatly.
The Judge standeth at the door. We are even now touching on the last scene of this awful mystery, and therefore we ought to be looking for the immediate appearance of the gifts.²¹

I cannot but tell what I have seen and heard. I have heard persons, both men and women, speak with tongues and prophesy, that is, speak in the Spirit to edification and exhortation and comfort. And I am compelled to regard these things as strong confirming signs of a great and approaching crisis - which I believe to be no less than the re-appearing of the Son of Man upon the earth. And I would entreat my reader not to throw this averment from him as the raving of an enthusiast, but to compare it with the Word of God.²²

We learn more in the Brazen Serpent than elsewhere about the sort of prophetic scheme Erskine believed in. He sets out the following series of events as leading up

to the eschaton:

- (i) The rejection of Christ by the Jews and their consequent dispersion;
- (ii) The rejection of Christ by the Gentiles: (a) by the corruption of the gospel in Romanism and much of Protestantism; (b) by outright infidelity;
- (iii) Calamity as divine judgment on the Gentile world, in which infidelity will destroy false Christianity;
- (iv) The rise to world dominion of an infidel power which will openly defy the true God;
- (v) The second coming of Christ;
- (vi) The restoration of Israel;
- (vii) The millennial reign of Christ from the throne of David;
- (viii) The restoration of all things.²³

Erskine thought that in the year 1831 the world was entering stage (iv).

We also learn that Erskine believed that Christ's millennial kingdom would include unbelievers as subjects of the reign of the saints and of Christ, and that death would continue to exercise power in this kingdom, but only over unbelievers.²⁴ Plainly, Erskine had been swept off his feet by premillennial speculations, doubtless under Irving's influence; the most poignant illustration of his enthusiasm is five pages of fantastic typological theorising about various apocalyptic beasts, a subject concerning which he had never said anything before and never would again.²⁵ His message to the world, however, was clear:

My dear reader, do not begin to put it away from you by saying, the world has survived many such storms and many such prophecies. We are certain that the present state of

things is sooner or later to be terminated by a mighty convulsion which is to prepare the way for the kingdom of Christ. We are therefore certain that every day brings that convulsion nearer; and thus that such an expectation must now be nearer than ever it was before. I am not specifying any precise number of years - but yet I must say that the prophetic record when compared with the signs of the times seems to indicate that we are arrived at the brink of the precipice. Certainly we are fast approaching to it; and therefore those who know the Lord ought to be waiting for Him ...²⁶

Apocalyptic literature depicts the struggle of good and evil in extreme, violent and lurid forms. It is no wonder, when Erskine's mind was so aglow with the fires of the apocalypse and the approaching millennium, that he should have identified the enemies of the Gareloch pentecost with the enemies of God. Were the restored charismata not signs of Christ's imminent return? Did the gifted ones not adhere to the doctrines of McLeod Campbell, Edward Irving and even Thomas Erskine? Was it not clear, then, that the Calvinistic opponents of the Row movement were in fact the agents of Satan himself? In the emotional temperature of controversy, millennialism and pentecostalism, it was pellucidly clear to Erskine that this was so. His denunciation of his theological critics consequently scaled greater heights, or plumbed lower depths, than ever before.

And what shall be said of those who, standing in the place of ambassadors of Christ and speaking in His name, do yet hold forth a false light to the world, and deliver a false message, denying that God is love and that Christ hath tasted death for every man? This is the very hiss of the Serpent who is even now combining the powers of this world against the rightful King ...²⁷

"The very hiss of the Serpent" : such was Erskine's verdict on the Evangelical Calvinism of his native land. It did not help when Calvinists impolitely returned the diabolical insult. But the invective could not stop there. The Church of Rome was Antichrist:

Yet apostate as she is, her apostacy is not so awful as the apostacy of those who deny that God is love to every man and that Christ is the propitiation of the sins of the whole world.²⁸

Worse than Antichrist! Could one seek a more sobering example of the polarised mind than this assessment of men like James Haldane, James Buchanan and Andrew Thomson? As the dark clouds gathered around the lonely figure of McLeod Campbell, Erskine pointed a prophetic finger at the Church of Scotland which was daring to discipline the man of God, and protested a

deep anxiety on their behalf as to the course which their supreme ecclesiastical court may pursue in those cases now before them, in which are involved the great and fundamental truths of God's Word - the great mystery of the godliness, God manifest in the flesh, and the love of God therein revealed to every man. It is a solemn trial for the Church of Scotland, it is the trial of the Church of Scotland. It is her trial, whether she will deny the Lord that bought her, or not.²⁹

We have seen enough of what the Brazen Serpent reveals of Erskine's turbulent state of mind. One interesting point of doctrine remains to be discussed, however. It represents an element of continuity in Erskine's theology, linking the Brazen Serpent of 1831 to the essay on Salvation of 1816; for Erskine had not abandoned his

Sandemanian understanding of saving faith, which he still defines as passive assent to the truth of the gospel. Not everything was in a state of dogmatic flux in Erskine's mind. He sets this out early in the book, where he is employing the biblical type of the brazen serpent (NUM. 21:5ff.) as a key to the nature of salvation - hence the title of the book. When the plague-smitten Israelite looked at the brazen serpent, his body experienced healing. This, Erskine says, is a parable of the spiritual healing experienced by the sinful Israelites when they understood God's forgiving and redeeming love towards them in the provision of the serpent.

In these two healings, there is, however, a perfect harmony, according to the different natures of the subject to be cured, viz. the body and the soul. For as soon as the bodily eye of the Israelite came in contact with the actually existing circumstances of the camp; that is to say, as soon as it rested on that brazen serpent, which was there whether it was looked at or not, the bodily life was healed. In the same way as soon as the mental eye, which is faith or understanding, came in contact with the meaning of the serpent, or the character of God revealed in it, the life of the soul was healed.³⁰

Knowing a thing as a truth is believing in it - and this is the only way in which the soul can look at anything. Looking in this case is just the material type of knowing or believing a thing.³¹

In this way Erskine combatted the more voluntaristic view of faith taken by his opponents whom he quotes as saying:

You must not only know that the Son of man was lifted up on the cross, but you must also look at him; in the same way as an Israelite had not merely to know that the

serpent was lifted up, but he had also to look at it.³²

If looking is a metaphor for believing, and believing is basically knowing (as Erskine was contending), this line of reasoning is obviously absurd. Erskine, then, stood fast by his intellectual view of faith, and here at least was a point of stability amid the strident evolution of his thought.

The Brazen Serpent is an extremely difficult book to read - by many degrees the worst book which Erskine had thus far written, from a literary point of view. The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel may not have paid adequate regard to logical sequence and structure, but there is a beauty about it which makes it easy and even enchanting to read. The Brazen Serpent, by contrast, commits both faults, lacking coherence in argumentative structure and being singularly destitute of readability. One can only surmise that the emotional pressure of Erskine's circumstances and expectations had contrived to rob him of his previous eloquence, replacing it with a confused and repetitive vehemence, peppered by highly unedifying outbursts of vituperation.

(vii) Triumph and Disaster

On February 9th, Dr. Andrew Thomson died suddenly and unexpectedly at the age of fifty-one. The Row movement thus lost one of its foremost and most formidable opponents. A tremendous public funeral was held on February 15th in Edinburgh, which attracted some ten thousand spectators and mourners; Thomas Chalmers preached the

funeral sermon. Chalmers declared that Thomson's chief characteristic had been "a dauntless uncompromising honesty in the maintenance of all which he deemed to be the cause of truth and righteousness".¹ Perhaps it was well for Erskine, Campbell and Irving that they had lost such a foe. Chalmers, who now became the acknowledged leader of the Evangelical party in the Kirk, certainly did not follow Thomson's example of high-spirited antagonism to the "Dunbartonshire school".

The day after Thomson's funeral, the examination of witnesses began in Dunbarton presbytery to establish the truth of the libel against McLeod Campbell. Among the witnesses for the prosecution were William Cunningham, latterly Principal of the Free Church College in Edinburgh and one of the nineteenth century's great Reformed theologians, who at that time was the assistant minister to Dr. Scott of Greenock, A.J. Scott's father; Robert Burns of Paisley, another Evangelical Church of Scotland minister; and John Arthur, pastor of an Independent church in Helensburgh. Burns and Arthur had both gone into print against Erskine and Campbell. This bears out the testimony of contemporary supporters of Campbell, that the Evangelical clergy took the lead in the anti-Row agitation. By the 19th, two witnesses had been examined. It seems to have gone well for Campbell, according to his own account:

Even Dr. Hamilton [of Strathblane] was obliged to confess that it was not so bad a doctrine as he had supposed. ²

The trial dragged on; every witness was examined "for five or six or seven hours"³. By March 11th Campbell's optimism had evaporated, and he wrote to his father:

I will not conceal from you that I have little expectation of anything less than deposition. Dr. Chalmers has, indeed, said that "the Moderation was not half so excited against me as the Evangelicals;" and that "he hoped I might be got through." But it is very doubtful whether he will be a member; and besides, the "Moderation" in my presbytery are not better than the rest.⁴

Once again the enigmatic figure of Chalmers surfaces; once again he is swimming against the Evangelical stream, hoping for Campbell's acquittal. The reference to the relative attitudes of Evangelicals and Moderates is also significant, in that while the former took the initiative in the anti-Row campaign, the latter went fully along with them and were "not better than the rest". The unholy alliance which A.J. Scott had dared to come into being had materialised perfectly.

On March 29th the worst came to the worst and Dunbarton presbytery found the libel proven by a majority of eleven to two. Only Robert Story and aⁿ elder from Cardross called Dunlop voted in Campbell's favour. Campbell was pronounced guilty of having

entertained and promulgated the doctrine of Universal Atonement and Pardon through the death of Christ, and also the doctrine that Assurance is of the essence of faith and necessary to salvation.⁵

Campbell of course appealed against the decision, and the case was referred to the local synod, that of Glasgow and Ayr.

Also in the course of March 1831, a lengthy tract by James Haldane appeared, entitled Observations on Universal Pardon, the Extent of the Atonement, and Personal Assurance

of Salvation. The whole tract was aimed specifically against Erskine, whom Haldane considered the source and fountain of the Row heresy, as most other opponents had done. Haldane made the by now standard Evangelical criticisms of Erskine's theology, and also attacked the moral government theory of the atonement which he doubtless felt to be behind the entire scheme.⁶ The influence of individual temperament on a man's beliefs he remarked on pointedly:

Our views of the gospel are frequently modified by our natural temper. When this is harsh and unbending, we are apt to dwell on the justice and severity of God, without sufficiently insisting on His mercy and long-suffering. Those, on the other hand, who are naturally mild and complying, are disposed exclusively to dwell on the kindness and love of God; and in place of the gospel of the grace of God ... a sentimental system is introduced, in which nothing but love is spoken of ...⁷

This, of course, was what he reckoned had happened in Erskine's case - with a considerable measure of justice, one feels. He also uttered the not uncommon prophecy that Erskine would end up a Universalist:

The doctrine of universal pardon necessarily leads to the doctrine of universal salvation ... It is hardly possible, that those who adopt this system should not proceed to universal salvation; at all events, this will be its certain effect on the minds of many. They will find that universal salvation removes many difficulties with which they were formerly embarrassed, and that it corresponds better with that "disinterested self-sacrificing love on the part of God", which the new doctrine endeavours to illustrate at the expense of all His other attributes.⁸

Amidst all the millennial prophecies of the Rowite charis-

matics, here was one prophecy from their enemies which actually came true.

On April 13th McLeod Campbell's case came before the synod of Glasgow and Ayr. Robert Story spoke in appeal against the proceedings of Dunbarton prebytery, but no record of his performance survives. Campbell made a long and well-argued speech in which he attempted to prove firstly that his doctrine was Biblical and true, and secondly that it was in harmony with the theology of the Reformation. We need not examine the former, since we have seen the basic arguments often enough already. As to the latter, Campbell mustered a formidable list of sixteenth century Protestant authorities in favour of universal atonement, including Calvin's Institutes.⁹ There is little doubt in the present writer's mind that the Reformers do seem to have believed in the universal extent of Christ's substitution; but it was, perhaps, not entirely candid of Campbell to quote them in his defence, since they certainly did not believe in the universal extent of actual divine forgiveness.

With regard to assurance, Campbell tried to qualify his position so as to head off the less discriminating assaults on it, by admitting that he believed that it was possible for a truly converted person to be "in doubt and darkness of the most fearful and the most appalling kind" regarding his being in a state of personal salvation.¹⁰ But this was a spiritually abnormal condition, according to Campbell, the result of "the temptation of Satan and the darkening power of the flesh".¹¹ Moreover, such doubt was inconsistent with the exercise of faith; that is, the believer's faith was not functioning during periods of doubt, at least in relation to the truth of his standing before God. Doubt was really a form of sinful unbelief.¹² This would surely not have palliated

the antipathy of Campbell's opponents, who would scarcely have accepted that a believer's doubts about his own salvation were necessarily manifestations of rebellion against God and His truth. Nor did Campbell retract his belief in the self-evidencing nature of faith which required no moral evidence in the life to prove its genuineness.

Campbell made a number of tactical mistakes in his speech. He began it by somewhat infelicitously comparing himself to Jesus Christ, Who also had to suffer misunderstanding and misinterpretation from His enemies.¹³ Worse, he cast aspersions on the Westminster Confession:

I am anxious to put you in possession of the exact feelings with which I contemplate the Westminster Confession of Faith. I hold that neither on the one subject nor the other [the extent of the atonement and assurance] has it set forth any lie. As to the truth of the matter, its statements are substantially true; but certainly I do hold that it is the fact that from the living religion of the Reformation Church - from the indications of personal experience which we have in the Confessions of the early Church, there is an awful falling off in the Confession we now have.¹⁴

At that point an offended member of synod interrupted Campbell and requested that he be forbidden to cast any aspersions on the godly Westminster divines.

The synod was not unduly impressed by Campbell's defence. Many of its members were openly hostile to him, or at least to his doctrines. James Begg of Paisley summed up the feelings of many:

If Mr. Campbell were an honest man, if he were a true Christian, if he had the fear of God before his eyes, he would have come forward and said, "I have changed my opinions; I swore to and subscribed with my

hand the Confession of Faith; but I am now convinced that the doctrines contained in it are not according to the Word of God, and I give up my charge." 15

The only member of synod to speak in Campbell's favour was Dr. John Wylie of Carlisle, a friend of his and Story's. Synod affirmed the relevance of the libel, but decided to make no decision as to Campbell's personal guilt. Instead it referred the case to General Assembly.

The charismatic movement finally reached London on April 30th in the following manner. John Bate Cardale, a pious young solicitor, had opened his home for weekly prayer meetings for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and these had been held since October 1830. Cardale was convinced of the authenticity of the Gareloch manifestations, having witnessed them at first hand, and he was soon to become the first "apostle" of the Catholic Apostolic Church. At the prayer meeting on April 30th, Cardale's wife Emma spoke in tongues. After the alien utterance, she interpreted it herself as meaning, "The Lord will speak to His people - the Lord hasteneth His coming - the Lord cometh, the Lord cometh, the Lord cometh!"¹⁶ Not long afterwards, another member of the prayer group, one Miss Hall, a governess in the household of Spencer Perceval (son of the assassinated Prime Minister), sang in tongues. As a good Anglican, Cardale reported the wonderful tidings to his parish minister, Baptist Noel of St. John's, Bedford Row, a staunch Evangelical congregation which numbered Thomas Scott among its previous pastors and William Wilberforce among its worshippers. Noel himself was one of the foremost Evangelical preachers of his day. Unfortunately he was not overly impressed with Cardale's news; indeed, he responded to it by preaching on the fraudulent nature of modern claims to the possession of the

charismata, to which Mr. and Mrs. Cardale eventually responded by leaving Noel's church. They ended up, inevitably, at Regent Square, worshipping under the amicable eye of Edward Irving. So it was that the gifts came to Irving's congregation, with results narrated below.

Meanwhile, on 4th May, that fastidious young progenitor of the pentecostal movement who had disowned his own offspring, A.J. Scott, was tried by the presbytery of Paisley for his refusal to subscribe to the Westminster Confession. The presbytery decided without discussion or vote that Scott's refusal thus to subscribe, being a declaration that the Westminster Confession was not the confession of his faith, was equivalent to a resignation of his licence to preach in a Church whose confession of faith was the Westminster Confession. Scott, however, seemingly becoming more quixotic every moment, disagreed with this decision, and argued that mere dissent from the Westminster Confession was not a sufficient ground for the Church to refuse accreditation to a preacher of the gospel. He insisted that presbytery must prove from the Bible that he was a positive heretic and depose him from office; he was not resigning his licence. The implacable presbytery would not listen to such arguments, however, and Scott appealed against their decision to General Assembly.¹⁷

And so, at last, the vexed cases of Campbell and Scott came before the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in May 1831. Campbell's case was dealt with first on Tuesday 24th May. The speeches of the parties involved took up the whole day. Campbell himself, Robert Story, Campbell's advocate Thomas Carlyle (no relation of his literary namesake), and Dr. Wylie of Carlisle spoke at length from the bar on one side of the floor, and an assortment of opponents from Dunbarton presbytery and the synod of Glasgow and Ayr spoke on the other. It was long

after midnight by the time these proceedings were finished. The majority of Assembly members left after the relevance of the libel had been established, apparently not realising that the guilt of the accused was also to be decided in the same session; the hasty, compressed nature of the proceedings was justified by the argument

that as there was such a press of business before the Assembly, its consideration could not be postponed till the following day, and therefore it was absolutely necessary they should proceed at once to a final judgment.¹⁸

The mass of evidence compiled by Dunbarton presbytery in a volume of four or five hundred pages had been given to members only on the afternoon of the 24th, and was never properly considered. After a number of brief speeches, the leader of the Moderate party, Dr. George Cook, Professor of Moral Philosophy at St. Andrews, moved that Campbell be deposed from the ministry. His motion was seconded by Dr. Patrick MacFarlane of St. Enoch's, Glasgow, an Evangelical. The unholy alliance confronted an isolated McLeod Campbell in all its strange, irresistible strength. Cook was to champion the cause of patronage in the coming ten years' struggle over that issue which was to shatter the Church of Scotland; MacFarlane was to be equally vehement on the popular non-intrusionist side, sacrificing the richest living in the Kirk (Greenock's West Parish) at the Disruption. For the moment, however, the two men stood united, the arch-Moderate and the uncompromising Evangelical, proposing and seconding Campbell's dismissal from office.

The Rev. Lewis Rose of Nigg countered this move with a more temperate suggestion simply to suspend Campbell from his duties, but this met with little approval. Campbell's

father, the Rev. Donald Campbell of Kilninver, who had the misfortune to be a member of that unmerciful Assembly, made a sincere and emotional speech in defence of his son, rendered all the more painful by the fact that the proposer of the motion for deposition, Dr. Cook, was an old friend of Campbell senior's. He presented a petition from his son's parishioners on their pastor's behalf, and ended with these words: .

I can say that I never heard any preacher more earnestly and powerfully recommending holiness of heart and life. It was certainly what I never expected, that a motion for his immediate deposition should have come from my old friend, Dr. Cook; but I do not stand here to deprecate your wrath. I bow to any decision to which you may think it right to come. Moderator, I am not afraid for my son; though his brethren cast him out, the Master whom he serves will not forsake him; and while I live, I will never be ashamed to be the father of so holy and blameless a son.¹⁹

Then the vote was taken. There were only 125 members present out of a total of some 300; 119 voted for Campbell's deposition, and 6 for his suspension. Prior to the official pronouncement of the sentence of deposition, a minor disagreement as to the order of procedure occurred, during which the chief clerk of the Assembly, Dr. MacKnight of Edinburgh, declared - or meant to declare - that the Church of Scotland would remain and flourish long after the doctrines of McLeod Campbell had perished and were forgotten. Unhappily, Dr. MacKnight mixed up his words, and was heard to say, "These doctrines of Mr. Campbell will remain and flourish after the Church of Scotland has perished and is forgotten."

At which point, Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, who had watched the day's proceedings with a pained and discon-

solate spirit, turned and whispered to those sitting behind him, "This spake he not of himself, but being high priest, he prophesied."²⁰ One of the Assembly members, reacting very differently to the appalled Erskine, rose up

to congratulate the House, the Church, and the country on the unanimity thus manifested by the two great parties [Evangelicals and Moderates] that so often had been engaged in keen controversies. It was now manifest that these were but of trifling importance, and that when the great fundamentals of the faith were in hazard, they were one in sentiment, and could act harmoniously!²¹

So it was that at quarter past six in the morning, on Wednesday 25th May 1831, John McLeod Campbell found himself deposed from the ministry of the Church of Scotland by its supreme court, for holding and promulgating the heresies of universal atonement and pardon through the death of Christ, and assurance as being of the essence of saving faith. The forces of reaction had triumphed, and the ultimate ecclesiastical disaster which Campbell had so long feared had at last befallen him.

On Friday 27th May, it was the turn of A.J. Scott to stand before the Assembly. He was dealt with far more curtly than Campbell had been, for the simple reason that whereas Campbell had maintained that his doctrines did not contradict the Westminster Confession, the more lucid and quixotic Scott wished to prove to the Assembly that although his doctrines did contradict the Confession, the Confession contradicted the Bible. It was not really to be expected that he would make much progress with such a line of argument, and Scott was interrupted in the course of his exposition by Patrick MacFarlane, the seconder of the motion to depose McLeod Campbell, who declared that

It was unworthy of the dignity of the Assembly to sit and hear, not a reasoning or discussion upon the finding of the Presbytery appealed from; but on a distinguishing principle of the Church of Scotland, on the Confession of Faith and certain standards, which the appellant himself had sworn to maintain and defend, and tending to show these standards were false.²²

Others both Moderate and Evangelical echoed this sentiment. Paradoxically, so did Robert Story, in a way, and in private. He wrote afterwards:

Any licentiate of the Church of Scotland appearing at the bar of the supreme judiciary to avow that he held doctrines contrary to the standards could scarcely expect any other result than a declaration that, if so, he could no longer be recognised as entitled to preach the gospel with their sanction ... The proposal on the part of Scott to reason the matter with them I have never been able to regard, although apparently reasonable, as in reality practicable. For every year there might be individuals travelling to the bar of the Assembly, challenging it on some other point or dogma, so that in fact there would be no other alternative than either to dispense with the Confession altogether, or to have incessant polemical discussions upon each or all of its doctrines.²³

But Story felt that the Assembly's own conduct had been less than satisfactory:

The Assembly, however, decided recklessly, not looking beyond the standards. They ought to have said, as a court deliberating under the eye and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, the opinions you entertain are contrary to the Holy Scriptures, and therefore you can no longer be entrusted with the preaching of the gospel.³⁴

Dr. John Lee, a leading Moderate, moved that Scott be deprived of his licence to preach for having admitted that he did not believe in the whole doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith, to which he had subscribed when originally licensed. Dr. Cook supported this motion. The Assembly accordingly deprived Scott. Triumph and disaster, once again - only this time it had been two Moderates who had dealt the final blow.

After Scott's deposition, he and McLeod Campbell walked home together.

After that dreary night in the Assembly, the dawn breaking upon us as we returned, at length alike condemned, to our lodging in the New Town of Edinburgh, I [Scott] turned round and looked on my companion's face [Campbell] under the pale light, and asked him, could you sign the Confession now? His answer was, "No. The Assembly was right. Our doctrine and the Confession were incompatible". So I had admitted, but I also asked which was true.²⁵

The Assembly's work was not yet over, for it performed two other actions along these lines. In the first place, it tried another young licentiate called Hugh Baillie MacLean for holding the Irvingite heresy of Christ's fallen humanity. MacLean had come under Irving's influence in London, where he was minister of the London Wall Scottish congregation until the Spring of 1830. Irving had preached his induction sermon, generally looked on as the finest specimen of Irving's oratorical gifts. MacLean had then been presented to the parish church of Dreghorn in Ayrshire, but had immediately become embroiled in doctrinal dissension over his adherence to Irving's Christology. His ordination was suspended and the General Assembly of 1830 had directed his presbytery to conduct a detailed examination of the case. As a result of this,

MacLean finally found himself on trial for heresy before General Assembly in the ill-omened month of May 1831. That assertively orthodox body pronounced him guilty, deprived him of his licence to preach, and ejected him from the Kirk. The Assembly had thus managed the considerable feat of casting from the Church of Scotland's bosom three of the Erskine-Campbell-Irving circle in one sustained surge of anti-heretical energy.²⁶

Secondly, the initial steps were at last taken against Irving himself. A report was presented to the Assembly concerning "books and pamphlets containing erroneous opinions";²⁷ in approving the report, a motion was carried stipulating that if Edward Irving ever claimed the privileges of a licentiate or minister of the Church of Scotland, the presbytery in whose bounds he made such a claim should inquire of him whether he was the author of certain works and then proceed as it deemed fit. Thus Irving too fell under the lash, although he was not actually tried or deposed. The writing, however, was clearly on the wall.

Two questions confront us as we take our leave of this eventful period. Did the charismatic movement contribute to the summary nature of the deposition of McLeod Campbell? And why did Thomas Chalmers maintain such an enigmatic silence throughout this crucial and turbulent hour?

That the hostility to Campbell was definitely and seriously augmented by the pentecostal revival of the Gareloch is a conclusion affirmed by a number of historians. R.H. Story, for instance, argued thus:

Many events had been occurring ... in the neighbourhood of Row, of a nature calculated to shock and disturb most men's minds [viz. the charismatic manifestations] ; and these, though utterly unconnected with Mr. Campbell

and his teaching, had been either wilfully or in foolish ignorance represented as associated therewith; so that now to all formerly existing causes of distrust and hostility, was added a new one, as powerful perhaps as all the rest.²⁸

T.B. Niven agreed:

It would be difficult to understand the excitement which Mr. Campbell's utterances had excited, and the alarm of the Church at them, if we were to leave out of account significant incidents of a different character that were taking place on the opposite bank of the Gareloch during the time when Mr. Campbell was so conspicuously before the religious public, that were ultimately associated with events occurring elsewhere [i.e. in Irving's London congregation], and with which it was vaguely rumoured Campbell was in sympathy.²⁹

Principal Shairp also concurred in this view:

It [Campbell's preaching] was discredited, unfortunately, at the time by its supposed connection with a claim to the revival of miracles, and is known to many now only in this association.³⁰

These statements are corroborated by our review of the literature of 1830, in which a direct continuity between Rowites and charismatics is assumed by the polemicists of orthodoxy. If we accept this construction, more light is shed on the brusque nature of the opposition to Campbell. However unfairly, he was held responsible by his adversaries for that efflorescence of pentecostal enthusiasm which they regarded as both impious and absurd.

It was impious because of its pretensions to new, extra-Scriptural revelations of God's will through the prophetic utterances of Mary Campbell and the MacDonald brothers, something which Scottish Calvinists were not about to accept when they had been crusading since 1825 for a pure canon of Scripture against the apocrypha in the Bible Society controversy. Were new prophecies any better than old apocrypha? Did not both assail the purity and sufficiency of the sixty-six canonical Scriptures as the Christian's rule of belief and conduct? The passions aroused in the apocrypha controversy may thus have overflowed into the Row controversy by natural progression. But as well as being impious, the charismatic revival was also absurd to the champions of orthodoxy, because it thrived on emotion and imagination, and tended to discount the critical intellect (the very reason A.J. Scott had rejected it). The miraculous, the sensational, the weird and wonderful, the pseudo-inspired outbursts of the uneducated, were substituted for the cool clarity of Protestant reason exercised on the text of the Bible. Absurdity of this sort was quite unacceptable, a disgrace to the sober religion of the Scottish people. We recall the lament over Erskine pronounced by Josiah Conder: "it is with no other feeling than that of sober sadness that we find such a man prostrated at the shrine of Absurdity".³¹ We recall also the complaint of the Edinburgh Christian Instructor that the charismatics "talk of working miracles as familiarly as sober people talk of putting up an umbrella".³² The key word is "sobriety". The charismatics lacked it, or were perceived to lack it. They were addicted to "whatever is wild, or new, or mystical, or removed from ordinary thought, and ordinary feeling, and ordinary belief" - in Dr. Thomson's words.³³ The orthodox antipathy to the impious and absurd Gareloch pentecost thus probably contributed substantially to the strength of feeling against Campbell, and helps us a little better to under-

stand the abrupt nature of the proceedings against him in the Church courts. It also helps us to understand the unity of Moderates and Evangelicals in this matter, since the former had even less time than the latter for religious mania of any sort.

What then of Chalmers? Why did the leader of the Evangelical party in the Kirk maintain a position of such apparent indifference during the trial and condemnation of McLeod Campbell? We have seen all along how Chalmers stood out against the general Evangelical reaction to Campbell and Erskine, and how his own beliefs about the extent of the atonement were broadly similar to theirs. If he was so sympathetic, why did he do nothing to help? At the time of Campbell's trial before the Assembly, Chalmers remarked in conversation to Lord Elgin that Campbell was "in conduct irreproachable - in doctrine unexceptionable - but in language rash".³⁴ This was identical to the verdict passed on Campbell by his colleague Robert Story. But Story stood by Campbell throughout his ordeal and supported him with great loyalty. If Chalmers believed that Campbell's only problem lay in the area of language and not of doctrine, why did he not offer any support?

Chalmers took no part in the deliberations of the General Assembly which deposed Campbell. On the very day of Campbell's trial, Chalmers wrote:

In regard to Mr. Campbell etc., it would have required a whole month to have mastered the recent authorship on these topics, and to have prepared myself to my own satisfaction for taking part in the deliberations of the Assembly regarding them. As far as my light goes I have rendered advice to Dr. MacFarlan and others on the subject.³⁵

This carries an air of tragi-comic nonsense about it. If Chalmers rendered advice to Dr. MacFarlane, and Dr. MacFarlane seconded the proposal to depose Campbell, what on earth was Chalmers' advice? Scarcely that Campbell should be deposed if his conduct was irreproachable and his doctrine unexceptionable. Even after Campbell's deposition, Chalmers commented that if a window could be opened up into the ex-pastor of Row's breast, it would be seen how little he had differed from his brethren.³⁶ Yet Chalmers had remained publicly silent.

Several writers have highlighted Chalmers' strange behaviour in this connection. R.H. Story said:

One striking circumstance connected with the public proceedings in the Church courts regarding this great question raised by Campbell's preaching, was the absence of the Church's most distinguished divine, the then celebrated Professor of Theology in the Metropolitan University. It is not needful to assign any reason why he declined to be a member of the Assembly in which Campbell was condemned, as well as in that which preceded it; but that given by his biographer [Hanna] for his having stood aloof from those who took part in that controversy is such that, unless constrained to record it by some paramount necessity, it ought, for the reputation of that great man, to have been concealed. If a month's careful reading would have been indispensable to enable him to form a right judgment, what opinion can be formed of the competency of those hundred and twenty clerical and lay judges who felt themselves quite competent with such promptitude to decide that the teaching of their accused brother deserved the penalty of deposition? ³⁷

Mrs. Oliphant was more trenchant:

It is, perhaps, the chapter in his life least

honourable to the most eminent Scotch Churchman of his day ... "Amid this conflict of opinion, of which he was far from being an unmoved spectator, Dr. Chalmers preserved unbroken silence," says his biographer

[Hanna] . It seems exactly the course of procedure which Dr. Chalmers ought not to have adopted ... the chief representative of what is called in Scotland the theological faculty, sat apart and preserved unbroken silence, leaving the ship at a crisis of its fate, the army at the most critical point of the battle, to the guidance of accident or the crowd. It is impossible not to feel that this abandonment of his position, at so important a moment, was such an act of cowardice as must leave a lasting stain upon the reputation of one of the greatest of modern Scotsmen.³⁸

Principal Tulloch also recorded the fact in such a way as to reflect unhappily on Chalmers:

It is alleged also that he looked on the proceedings against Irving and Campbell with disapproving eyes. Possibly, if he had been a man of more independent, courageous, and clear-sighted vision than he was, he might have done something to stay these proceedings, or guide them to a more lenient result. But the panic which moved the church at the time was too real to have been easily stayed; and Chalmers did nothing.³⁹

Among more modern interpreters, Burleigh remarks that Chalmers "was curiously detached during the Rhu [Row] case";⁴⁰ while Drummond and Bulloch note that "Chalmers, who might have done so much, did nothing to aid them

[Campbell and Irving] . His mind, for all its great qualities, was essentially that of a conservative ..."⁴¹

The fact of Chalmers' enigmatic aloofness, then, has not gone unnoticed, and the generally acceptable explanation

seems to be that whereas Chalmers deeply sympathised with the theology of Campbell, Erskine and Irving, he also felt that he did not fully understand its presuppositions and intentions, and hence experienced a sort of paralysis of will, an enfeebling uncertainty of mind, which prevented him from saying or doing anything one way or the other during the crisis. In the words of H.F. Henderson, "it is next to certain that his regrettable silence was due to the hesitancy of an undecided mind, and not to the influence of temporising motives".⁴²

And yet one remains dissatisfied. Did Chalmers not explicitly say that Campbell's doctrine, Campbell's theology, was unexceptionable, and that it was only his language that was rash? We may recall with profit here the comment made by Chalmers to Erskine himself later in life:

I feel convinced of a radical and essential unity betwixt us, however diverse and distorting the media might be between our respective visions and certain of those questions on which we may chance to differ.⁴³

This is very similar to Chalmers' response to Campbell. Chalmers seems to have believed that there was some kind of deep, fundamental oneness of thought between himself, Erskine and Campbell, which was merely superficially obscured by "rash language" or "distorting media" - matters of articulation rather than of real theological substance. But if so, the question returns with renewed and exasperating insistence : why was Chalmers silent? To this we can only offer the following tentative reply.

Chalmers may have felt that the world was not yet ready to hear what Erskine and Campbell had to say - not yet prepared to view their utterances in the same mellow

light in which he himself viewed them. We may recall a pregnant statement made by Chalmers which we cited previously in our analysis of his beliefs about the extent of the atonement:

There is still a remainder of the old spell, even the spell of human authority, and by which a certain cramp or confinement has been laid on the genius of Christianity. We cannot doubt that the time of its complete emancipation is coming, when it shall break loose from the imprisonment in which it is held; but meanwhile there is as it were a stricture upon it not yet wholly removed, and in virtue of which the largeness and liberality of heaven's own purposes have been made to descend in partial and scanty droppings through the strainers of an artificial theology, instead of falling as they ought in a universal shower upon the world.⁴⁴

The day when men, particularly Evangelical and Scottish men, could listen calmly and charitably to an Erskine or a McLeod Campbell had not yet come. Chalmers felt that there was at bottom a substantial spiritual unity between traditional Evangelicalism and what Erskine and Campbell were saying, however cramped and hidebound the articulations of the former and however novel and ill-advised the articulations of the latter. Others, however, could not as yet see this, and for as long as they could not, Erskine and Campbell were bound to meet with a negative reception. History must take its course; a larger day would come, eventually. Chalmers' silence in the Row controversy can thus be interpreted as a submission to what he felt to be an historic inevitability, rather than the product of a perplexed and undecided mind.

V. THE AFTERMATH, 1831 - 37

(i) The Catholic Apostolic Church : from faith to disillusion

The deposition of Scott and Campbell, especially the latter, by the General Assembly of 1831, made a profound impression on Erskine. From that time, until two decades afterwards, he withdrew from the spiritual ministrations of the Church of Scotland. In the words of Principal Shairp:

He never ceased to regard it as the stoning by the Church of Scotland of her best prophet, the deliberate rejection of the highest light vouchsafed to her in his time. Few felt as he did that day; but as years went on more and more woke up to know what an evil thing had been done in the land. From that time on for many years he ceased to have any sympathy with the Church of Scotland, when not only the men, but the truth he most prized, had been so rudely trampled down. In his eyes all the calamities that befell her [i.e. the ten years' conflict and the Disruption] were the natural sequel of, perhaps judgment for, the wrong she had done in 1831.¹

As Erskine himself put it:

It seems as if the Church of Scotland threw away its peace when it threw him [Campbell] out of its bosom. What confusion has there been ever since! What indeed can unite men together, but the sense of the universal love of God, which that Church rejected in the person of him who was honoured to preach it?²

Erskine, in fact, seems to have become disenchanted, not only with the Church of Scotland, but with all established denominations. The depth of his disenchantment can be

seen from the fact that from the time of Campbell's deposition until April 1838, when Erskine went on his third continental holiday, the laird of Linlathen attended no church on a regular basis, but acted as prophet and priest in his own household, conducting religious services in the mornings and evenings every Sunday in Linlathen house, to which all were welcome. These services were not continued when Erskine arrived back from the continent in 1840. For the period 1831 - 37, then, a sorely aggrieved Erskine basically acted as his own pastor and the pastor of the worshippers who cared to gather in Linlathen house to hear his preaching.³

These years were dominated from a spiritual point of view by two concerns in Erskine's mind. The first was the continuing development of the charismatic movement which had begun at the Gareloch, but whose centre of gravity now switched to London and Edward Irving's congregation. The second was the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination and election.

It is not our task in this thesis to tell the story of the birth of the Catholic Apostolic Church; that has been done elsewhere. Some brief sketch of events, however, will be necessary in order to understand the framework of Erskine's thinking about the charismatic movement and its evolution into a new denominational church order in these years.

We have seen that Mrs. Cardale and Miss Hall, two of Irving's congregation, had already spoken in tongues in private. As yet, however, no public utterances had been delivered. These, when they came, developed out of an early morning prayer meeting instituted by Irving for the purpose of asking God's blessing on the General Assembly of 1831 - a purpose harshly frustrated by the unceremonious depositions of Campbell, Scott and MacLean. The meetings, however, continued as occasions for praying

that the Holy Spirit might be poured out on the congregation. Irving described it thus:

We met together about two weeks before the meeting of the General Assembly, in order to pray that the General Assembly might be guided in judgment by the Lord, the Head of the Church; and we added thereto prayers for the present low state of the Church. We cried unto the Lord for apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, anointed with the Holy Ghost, the gift of Jesus, because we saw it written in God's Word that these are the appointed ordinances for the edifying of the body of Jesus. We continued in prayer every morning, morning by morning, at half-past six o'clock; and the Lord was not long in hearing and in answering our prayers.⁴

A Mr. Edward Taplin took the lead in the public exercise of the gifts. He was the first "prophet" to arise in Irving's congregation, bursting on the spiritual scene with such utterances as, "It is thou, O Britain: thou art the anointed cherub."⁵ Soon after this, one or two more ladies spoke in tongues. Irving at first permitted the exercise of these gifts only in the early morning meetings, but on Sunday 16th October 1831, the inevitable finally happened when Miss Hall felt unable to contain herself and rushed from the morning service of worship into the vestry, spoke in tongues, and then interpreted, ending in a voice loud enough for the congregation to hear - "How dare ye to suppress the voice of the Lord?"⁶ From then onwards, public tongue-speaking, interpretation and prophecy became the norm in Sunday worship.

The general Evangelical reaction was exceedingly negative, and was summed up in the passionate opposition to these new developments on the part of Charles Simeon, the dean

of Anglican Evangelicalism. Simeon preached a series of sermons on the Holy Spirit in 1832, designed to correct Irvingite errors; he called Irving and his followers "brainsick enthusiasts", and averred "my abhorrence both of their principles and proceedings". "If I say the truth," he rumbled, "I think it charity to account for Mr. Irving's sentiments and conduct by tracing them to an aberration of mind." The incipient Catholic Apostolic Church, according to one of Simeon's friends, "never had a more determined, uncompromising enemy than in Simeon."⁷

With Evangelical opinion in particular and public opinion in general raging against him, Irving was brought to trial before the presbytery of London on 26th April 1832 by the trustees of Regent Square church. There were five charges against him, the first of which was

That the Rev. Edward Irving has suffered and permitted, and still allows, the public services of the church in the worship of God, on the Sabbath and other days, to be interrupted by persons not being either ministers or licentiates of the Church of Scotland.⁸

The other five charges were similar. Underlying them was a dispute between Irving and his more "sober" eldership as to who was responsible for the order of public worship, Irving maintaining that this belonged to him alone, the elders arguing that it was their collective responsibility. Underlying this dispute, layer beneath layer, was the fact that hardly any of the elders (or trustees - only one of each, in fact) were in favour of the charismatic manifestations, and would have suppressed them had their collective responsibility for the order of worship been admitted. As it was, the trustees decided to break the deadlock between Irving and his elders

by appealing the case to London presbytery, whose jurisdiction Irving had so dramatically disowned in December 1830. The elders had supported Irving then, when his Christology had been the issue; but Christology was one thing, and speaking in tongues was quite another.

The trial, needless to say, went against Irving. He insisted that the sole relevant point was whether the tongues and prophecies were of God; presbytery insisted that the sole relevant point was whether the practices introduced on Irving's authority into his congregation's worship were contrary to the laws of the Church of Scotland. On 2nd May 1832, Irving was presbyterially declared unfit to occupy the position of minister of Regent Square church.

That was on a Monday. On Friday 5th May Irving found himself locked out of his church building by the trustees when he arrived to preside over the morning prayer meeting. He and some eight hundred of his congregation accordingly departed from Regent Square and established themselves (eventually) in the West Picture Gallery, Newman Street, off Oxford Street. The ultimate separation had taken place. Soon the Catholic Apostolic Church began to take shape, with the appointment of John Bate Cardale as its first apostle on November 7th. By 1835 there were twelve apostles and a new order of "angels" (pastors, intermediate between apostles and elders - Irving was appointed an angel).

Erskine himself was not directly involved in the development of the charismata in London or the growth of the Catholic Apostolic Church, but maintained a keen observation as one who believed in the genuinely supernatural character of the pentecostal manifestations. He read the report of Irving's trial before the presbytery of

London in April 1832, and thought that Irving's speech in his own defence was "a very solemn appeal to the church and the world, as well as to his judges". Erskine felt that there was "a fearful character of judgment and desolateness" in the way that matters were developing "in our Church Courts", in addition to developments in secular politics.⁹ He discussed the charismata with Chalmers, and found him rather sceptical about their authenticity:

His feelings have been roused and excited a good deal on the subject of the gifts, and he seems to think, moreover, that when he says that holiness is a stronger demonstration to his mind of the power of God in the soul of man than any miraculous manifestations whatever, he brings an argument against the existence of the gifts and the propriety of expecting them. Whereas the question truly is, "How or by what means has God said that He would edify His church?" If He has said that He will edify it in holiness and love by means of the gifts, we need not reason about it ...¹⁰

This was a strange note for Erskine to strike, since up till now he had been insisting on the futility of any religion whose exercises and activities were not intellectually comprehended by the believer. Plainly his faith in the reality of the gifts was overbearing his normal processes of thought. This enthusiasm found expression in a letter to Chalmers, written in May 1832, in which Erskine endeavoured to bring Chalmers round to a positive view of the contemporary manifestations. Referring to "the vast importance of the subject of our conversation the other evening", he argued that the function of the charismata was "to edify the body and preserve unity".¹¹

There must be some principle of unity in a church, in order to the existence of a church. God's scheme for this unity is

the manifestation of the gifts; man's scheme in the absence of the gifts is a Confession of Faith. We must either have the one or the other in order to keep the Church together. Now, is it the sin of the Church, or only her misfortune, that she is without the gifts, and therefore obliged to have recourse to a Confession for the purpose of unity? Surely the Westminster divines did not exhaust the Bible; and if they had the Spirit, surely the divines of our day are not excluded from the Spirit, and if so, they ought to thank God for what light was seen before, and press on to farther light in the strength of the Spirit. If it be the sin of the Church to be without the gifts, then the necessity of the Confession is a sinful necessity, and ought not to be pleaded against any man who appeals to the Word and the interpretation of the Spirit. 12

What does Erskine mean here? How is church unity meant to be secured by the presence of tongues and prophecy? Perhaps Erskine meant that the very presence of such gifts proved that God Himself was in the midst, and that this proof of God's own presence constituted the real motive for unity. This again was a strange opinion for a man who had spent breath and ink insisting on the centrality of faith as intellectual assent to the truth. Instead of a believing acceptance of the theological verities of the gospel, Erskine was now pointing to a belief in the genuineness of certain spiritual manifestations as the true basis of association for Christians. In which case, those like Chalmers, McLeod Campbell, A.J. Scott and Robert Story, who conscientiously withheld their assent from the genuineness of such manifestations, must presumably be the archenemies of Christian unity, guilty renders of the seamless garment. Truly, Erskine's mind was afflicted with strange polarities in this phase of his religious evolution; he had far more in common with these men than with the authoritarianism and ecclesiastic-

ism of Irving and his pentecostal colleagues.

Erskine may have been aware of the temporary loss of equi-
poise which his mind had suffered at this period. He
wrote to his elder sister,

Dear, dear Christian, I hope you can sometimes
pray our Father to keep me from the way of
evil, whatever that evil may be. Evil in
the form of good is what we have to fear. 17

As yet, however, Erskine showed no signs of the impending
crisis of full-blown scepticism he was soon to experience
in relation to the restored charismata.

The General Assembly of 1832 deposed yet another minister,
the Rev. William Dow of Tongland, for challenging the
Westminster Confession. Dow belonged to the charismatic
circle and was probably under Irving's influence, having
attended the Albury prophetic conferences from 1826 -
30. He became one of the twelve apostles of the Catholic
Apostolic Church in 1835. Chalmers was Moderator of
the Assembly that year and had the task of pronouncing
Dow's sentence of deposition. Erskine was present, and
regarded the proceedings as yet more evidence of the
spiritual destitution of the Church of Scotland.

You will, before this reaches you, have learned
through the newspapers that Mr. William Dow
has been deposed from being a minister in
the Church of Scotland. It was very painful
to hear them distinctly and avowedly refuse
any appeal to the Scriptures, affirming that
the interpretation given by the standards
was to be regarded as the limit of all preach-
ing and teaching within the Church ... I
was very sorry for Dr. Chalmers, who was
Moderator; he was the mouth of the Assembly
in pronouncing the sentence of deposition,
which is an awful sentence, being pronounced
in the name of Christ, although all of them
believed him to be really a faithful servant

of Christ ... And the Clerk of the Assembly, in reading over the sentence declaring the church of Tongland vacant, twice by mistake called it the church of Scotland, declaring it vacant. There is prophecy in these things.¹⁴

Erskine spent the summer of 1832 at Linlathen and Cadder in the company of Louis Gaussen. Gaussen belonged to that circle of French-speaking Evangelicals, including Adolphe Monod, César Malan and Merle d'Aubigné, whose acquaintance Erskine had made in his first continental holiday in 1822 - 25. Like most of these others, Gaussen was a product of Robert Haldane's preaching ministry in Geneva in 1816 - 19, and he had followed in his spiritual mentor's footsteps in holding to a strongly Calvinistic conception of Christianity. This was bound to result in tension and friction between himself and Erskine, and so indeed it did, as we shall see in a moment. Erskine doubtless knew Gaussen from his visits to Geneva in 1823 and 1824; he mentioned him in a letter to cousin Rachel written from Brigue in 1826 during his second continental trip:

My friend Gaussen, at Geneva, holds that the spirit is in a state of total insensibility from the instant of death until the instant of the general resurrection. The interval between death and judgment is in this way absolutely annihilated for them. Their last thought in this world will be instantaneously followed by the sound of the last trumpet.¹⁵

Gaussen himself, evidently, was not quite as orthodox as he could have been; the theory of soul-sleep is expressly contradicted by Westminster Confession 32:I. At the time when Gaussen visited Erskine in summer 1832, he was minister of a church in Satigny and was embroiled

in theological controversy with the Genevan church authorities, the vénérable compagnie des pasteurs, whose outlook was rationalistic. Apart from his belief in soul-sleep Gaussen maintained an undiluted Calvinistic orthodoxy, for which he is remembered by posterity through his classic treatise on the plenary verbal inspiration of Scripture entitled Theopneustia. The vénérable compagnie was not impressed; Gaussen was deposed in 1834.

Gaussen's Scottish holiday afforded him no relief from theological controversy. Hanna says that "lively discussions" between Erskine and Gaussen characterised their time together - probably an understatement.¹⁶ Erskine wrote a somewhat penitent epistle to Gaussen in December, apologising for his disputatious conduct during the vacation;

Although I have had much enjoyment in meeting you once more in this world, yet I have also suffered much, chiefly because I am sensible that in witnessing for God's truth to you, I often sinned against the law of love and meekness and patience. May the Lord forgive the sin, and mercifully overrule, so that it may not act in your mind as a reason against any truth which you heard from me.¹⁷

The rest of the letter is an exposition of various familiar themes in Erskine's thought about universal atonement and forgiveness, etc.

By the time this letter to Gaussen was written, Erskine had finally ejected from his mind the Calvinistic doctrine of election. With this development, his break with Scottish Evangelicalism and with his own past was complete.

It appears that chapter 18 of JEREMIAH, with its symbol of the spoiled and refashioned clay pot, was the crucial

factor in Erskine's thinking which at last led him to abandon his belief in unconditional personal election to salvation. The passage was to figure prominently in his book on Election in 1837. On 11th November 1832, he wrote about it to Mr. Montagu in what was meant to be a consolatory letter on the death of his wife:

I have been much struck lately with the 18th chapter of Jeremiah. The prophet went down to the potter's house, and there he saw the wondrous mystery of God's dealings with man. The potter made a work on the wheels, and it was marred in his hands, and he broke it and made it anew. Adam was the first vessel, and he marred himself in the hands of his Potter, and the Potter passed on him the sentence of death; He broke the mould and made a new one. And the new one is Christ ... God has sentenced the first vessel, the natural life, to be broken, because it was polluted; yet He does not intend to destroy the clay, but to new-model it under Christ the second vessel. The curse always rests on the first vessel, and the blessing always rests on the second; and both vessels are in the nature [of man], and every man may live in which he will, but he cannot enjoy the second without consenting to the breaking of the first i.e. through willing death ... The flesh is the rejected and reprobate vessel, and those who cling to it cling to the curse, and along with it are rejected and reprobate. Christ is the chosen and elect one, and those who abide in Him abide in the blessing, and are chosen and elect.¹⁸

What Erskine has done here is to reinterpret election in the light of his exemplarist emphasis in relation to the atonement and soteriology. The elect are simply those who follow in the footsteps of Jesus by submitting to the death of the old fallen nature. God has "chosen" Jesus, that is, chosen to bless Him with eternal life in consequence of His obedience unto death; all who imitate Jesus share in this election. Election, in other words, does not in the first place apply to persons but

to a state of mind (submissive cooperation with God's process of man's breaking and remaking), and individual persons are elect only insofar as they have this state of mind. A full-orbed doctrine of conditional election meets us, substantially Arminian in character. Erskine's talk of Christ as the one true elect is perhaps misleading in this connection since for Erskine the election of Christ merely means that He is the grand example of election, the living exegesis (as it were) of that term. To be in Christ is to be elect because "in Christ" refers to a life patterned after the model of Christ's willing acceptance of death as the way to life. That is the way in which Christ was elect, and that is the way in which men become elect also.

This final repudiation of the Calvinistic understanding of election meant that Erskine was now able to see God's love as extending to all men without exception in an absolutely equal way. Conditionality had at last been removed from the sphere of God's redemptive mercy, in that every human being could know that God loved him and was intent on his salvation, without ifs or buts. Erskine had found it virtually impossible to articulate this concern in a Calvinistic framework, owing to the fact that God's love runs along two distinct lines in Calvinistic thought: the line of common grace, which embraces all men but is not salvific in intention, and the line of special grace, which embraces the elect alone and is salvific in intention. The abandonment of election as Calvinistically conceived enabled Erskine now to postulate an egalitarian divine love which embraced all men and was intentionally salvific for all men.

Of course, the ultimate problem remained: why were not all men saved? Erskine's answer at the moment was that not all men cooperated with the salvific process. In other words, although he may not have phrased it in this manner, Erskine had universalised and equalised God's

salvific love at the expense of its effectiveness. In Calvinistic thought, God's salvific love is set only on the elect and is sovereignly effective in saving them all; in Erskine's new construction, God's salvific love is opened up in a global direction to include all men, but is no longer characterised by actual effectiveness in saving its objects. In a scheme which retains hell as the ultimate destination of at least some sinners, God's salvific intentions are thus universalised at the cost of being eternally defeated in the case of the lost. Readers of this thesis will know by now how Erskine eventually solved this final perplexity.

So 1832 came and went. The new year, 1833, was significant in Erskine's life principally because it was the year which witnessed the beginning of his disillusionment with the charismatic movement. Up until now, Erskine had found in the movement a potent source of spiritual encouragement, heralding as he believed the second advent of Christ and providing a living demonstration of the supernatural reality of God. Erskine alone of his circle had stood alongside Edward Irving in this pentecostal development; McLeod Campbell, A.J. Scott and Robert Story had either remained aloof from the outset or already become disenchanted after an initial credence which itself had been less than enthusiastic. Erskine, by contrast, had accepted the movement with an almost uncritical and irrational ardour. In so doing he had paved the way for the second great crisis of faith in his life with regard to the supernatural and the miraculous. We recall his youthful scepticism in 1811 when he had been Deistically tempted to disbelieve in the authenticity of the miracles recorded in the Bible. Now he faced an analogous crisis over the miracles of the Gareloch pentecost, only it was to be a crisis with a different and sadder ending.

The personal drama of Edward Irving, so central to the charismatic movement, was at the same time fast reaching its own sad climax. On 13th March 1833, Irving was at last tried for heresy and deposed from the ministry of the Church of Scotland by his home presbytery of Annan. The scene was typically melodramatic. Two thousand spectators packed the church building in Annan where the trial was held. Among Irving's judges was the Rev. Henry Duncan of Ruthwell, the philanthropist and founder of savings banks. Irving was charged with believing in the sinfulness of Christ's human nature. He defended himself with stormy eloquence which included the following outburst:

The greatest gift ever bestowed on the people of Scotland since the days of Knox - yea, a greater than he - I mean John Campbell - has been cast out. He was a spotless man of God. In him was no fault - albeit no fault that man could lay to his charge. He was a godly man. But him ye have cast out with scorn; and shall I not take his part - shall I not receive him to my bosom? - because in receiving him I receive Christ.¹⁹

This was to no avail. Just as the Moderator was about to pass sentence of deposition, one of Irving's charismatic friends, an ex-minister of the Kirk named David Dow (brother of the deposed William) who had resigned because of his adherence to the charismatic movement, was seized with inspiration and uttered a word of prophecy:

Arise, depart! Arise, depart! flee ye out, flee ye out of here! Ye cannot pray! How can ye pray? How can ye pray to Christ whom ye deny? Ye cannot pray. Depart, depart! flee, flee! ²⁰

Irving arose and departed, exclaiming to the assembled

onlookers,

Stand forth! stand forth! What! will ye
not obey the voice of the Holy Ghost? As
many as will obey the voice of the Holy Ghost
let them depart.²¹

Amid such turbulence ended Irving's problematic career as a Church of Scotland minister. The sentence of deposition was pronounced in his absence.

Erskine's personal contacts, however, were not with Irving or his London circle, but with the MacDonald brothers and their circle in Port Glasgow. After Campbell's deposition, the MacDonalds had resigned their membership of the Church of Scotland and turned their own regular prayer meeting into a church-without-a-pastor. They also preached, both in their own home and in a hired chapel; great crowds attended them for a time, but they themselves lamented the apparent spiritual ineffectualness of their evangelistic labours. "It is the cause of much sorrow to us," said James, "that we hear of none who are brought from the bondage of sin into the glorious liberty of Jesus."²²

It was in connection with the MacDonalds that Erskine received his first rude shock which compelled him to think twice about the genuineness of the contemporary charismata. He described the event thus:

the circumstances which shook me with regard to the MacDonalds at Port Glasgow, [were] that in two instances when James MacDonald spoke with remarkable power, a power acknowledged by all the other gifted people there, I discovered the seed of his utterances in the newspapers. He had read there a foolish rumour about the time of George IV's death, that the Ministers would probably find it convenient to conceal that event when it

took place, until they had made some arrangements. This had remained in his mind, and it came forth at last as an utterance in power, but wrapped in such obscurity of language as not to expose it to direct confutation; but on reading the paragraph I recognised such a resemblance that I could not doubt it, and I put it to him; and although he had spoken in perfect integrity (of that I have no doubt), yet he was satisfied that my conjecture as to its origin was correct. The other instance was a prophetic utterance of a war in the north of Europe - the language taken much from the 11th of Daniel; but the seed of it also was a newspaper paragraph. I thus see how things may come into the mind and remain there, and then come forth as supernatural utterances, although their origin be quite natural. James MacDonald could not say that he was conscious of anything in these two utterances distinguishing them from all the others; he only said that he believed that these two were of the flesh. Taplin made a similar confession on being reproved through Miss Emily Cardale for having rebuked Mr. Irving in an utterance. He acknowledged that he was wrong; and yet he could not say where the difference lay between that utterance and any other. Is there not a great perplexity in all this? Does the control of a church solve it?²³

It must have been a sore blow to Erskine's faith to discover that the real source of James MacDonald's two prophecies was not the Holy Spirit but the newspaper. Even more grievous must have been James' own candid admission that, from an experiential point of view, he could not see anything different between such admittedly spurious utterances and the allegedly authentic ones: they both felt the same in delivery. How, therefore, was one to discern between a true and a false prophecy when the prophet himself could not do so? The only answer to this which was being canvassed - "the control of a church", i.e. the authoritarian control of the growing Catholic Apostolic hierarchy - was an answer entirely unacceptable to Erskine, whose contempt for Roman Catholicism was at

least partly rooted in its authoritarian pretensions. No church authority could dictate to the individual conscience what was and what was not the truth of God. If the price of verifying charismatic prophecy was the introduction of a new papacy, Erskine was not willing to pay.

Erskine's letter to cousin Rachel in the wake of this spiritual shock is one of the most poignant he ever wrote. Sadness, perplexity and humility freely mingle in his transparently honest words:

Beloved friend, - My mind has undergone a considerable change since I last interchanged thoughts with you. I have seen reason to disbelieve that it is the Spirit of God which is in Mr. ---, and I do not feel that I have a stronger reason to believe that it is in others. This does not change my mind as to what the endowment of the Church is, if she had faith, but it changes me as to the estimate that I form of her condition ... Mr. and Mrs. Scott and Mrs. Rich are here. I have much sympathy with much that I meet in them. They fear that the outward forms and magnificent utterances have that in them from which the carnal mind draws nourishment, and that there is a temptation to put these things between God and the soul, and to take them on trust that they are of God, although the hearer himself personally may not be conscious of meeting God in them ... You know that Mr. Scott is entirely separated from Mr. Irving and his church, believing it, as I understand, to be a delusion partly, and partly a spiritual work not of God. He conceives that there is a disposition to yield to spiritual influence, as in animal magnetism, which lays one open to such possession ... I cannot believe that there has been no pouring out of the Spirit at Port Glasgow and in London: but I feel that I have to wait in every case upon the Lord, to receive in my heart directly from Himself my warrant to acknowledge anything to be of His supernatural acting, and I have erred in not waiting for this ... 24

"I have erred". From this point onwards, all the arrogant dogmatism which had disfigured Erskine's theology and writings since 1828 began to evaporate, and the old note of grace and personal diffidence began to return. Not indeed that Erskine gave up having positive convictions, but that the harsh and wounding edge was removed from his expression of them and from his disagreement with opponents. Erskine the gladiator had started to take his armour off.

His faith in the genuineness of the spiritual gifts having thus been shaken, Erskine's task had now become that of articulating the precise nature of his new and unexpected dissatisfaction, and of creating, if necessary, a framework of thought in which to reject the charismatic manifestations in general and the Catholic Apostolic Church in particular. The key to this he found in an observation of A.J. Scott and his wife, and Mrs. Rich, concerning the piety of many of the charismatics:

there is a temptation to put these things between God and the soul, and to take them on trust that they are of God, although the hearer himself personally may not be conscious of meeting God in them.

Erskine expanded on this point in a letter to John McLeod Campbell's sister in January 1834:

We have had great trial about the spiritual gifts. The spirit which has been manifested has not been a spirit of union, but of discord. I do not believe that the introduction of these gifts, whatever they may be, has been to draw men simply to God. I think the effect has rather been to lead men to take God, as it were, on trust from others ... It is not what another man hears and tells me that is life to me, even though what he hears may be truly from God; I must hear God Himself, and "they that hear shall

live" JN. 5:25. I am very much shaken, indeed, as to the whole matter of the gifts. The many definite predictions that have been given and that have entirely failed when tried by Deut. xvii.22 should lead us to great watchfulness. It is indeed a strange time - a time for keeping close under the Shepherd's shadow. In London the voice [of prophecy] appoints ordinances and rules in the Church, and it seems to me that their snare is to trust in their ordinances as their ordained pastors, and prophets, and elders.²⁵

Erskine's mind seized on the undoubted fact that a claim to be speaking from God and the truth of that claim are two different things. How could one authenticate the voice of God in what purported to be His utterance? James MacDonald had been unable to make any distinction between the genuine and the counterfeit in his own prophetic inspirations. Yet almost all the believers in the pentecostal manifestations took it for granted that God was truly speaking to them through those who were allegedly His prophets and apostles, and the latter encouraged and indeed required this attitude from their followers. Erskine's soul was in full cry against such an authoritarian piety, on the basis that it destroyed the deeply personal nature of New Testament religion. "They shall all be taught of the Lord", he cited from ISA. 54:13. It was not enough to take God's voice on trust when one had no personal perception of the spiritual genuineness of the utterance, for this was to set up other mediators than Christ between the soul and God.

Erskine also mentions in this letter the fact of predictive prophecies which had not come true, referring to DEUT. 18:22, as having pointed if unwelcome relevance in such a case:

When a prophet speaks in the name of the

LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

Failed predictions were thus added to newspaper-inspired utterances as arguments against the truth of the charismatic movement. In addition, Erskine could scarcely have avoided noticing the embarrassing defections from Irving's ranks in London. Robert Baxter, the most influential of the early prophets in Regent Square church, had renounced his belief in his own inspiration and proclaimed it all a delusion, publishing a damaging Narrative of Facts in 1833. George Pilkington, a minor prophet, had set a precedent for Baxter's recantation in 1831, when he had withdrawn from Irving's congregation and published his The Unknown Tongues Discovered to be English, Spanish and Latin, and the Rev. Edward Irving proved erroneous in attributing these utterances to the influence of the Holy Spirit. Even Miss Hall, who had led the way in tongue-speaking during the Sunday worship, had recanted and left Regent Square. Erskine knew about the false prophecy of Edward Taplin, cited earlier, and so it is entirely possible that he also knew about these defections and that they contributed to his loss of confidence in the charismata.

On Monday 3rd March Erskine preached in the school-house at Glentyan near Glasgow. Here he renewed his friendship with McLeod Campbell, who went out to hear Erskine preach. Campbell had been pastor of his own Independent church in Glasgow since the January of 1834, and also preached on weekdays in Greenock and Paisley. He has left an account of the scene at Glentyan:

I went out Monday to Glentyan ... I was a hearer on Monday night, the people having

been assembled in the school-house to hear Mr. Erskine. As I had come out he wished me to preach. I would not consent, however, and was afterwards thankful I had not; not only because of the refreshment to myself in what I heard from him, but also that a number of my Paisley people had come purposely to hear him. I was much refreshed also by my intercourse with him. His face and manner, as well as conversation, seem, more than ever I saw him, full of peace and joy in God. ²⁶

Campbell's remark about Erskine's increased spiritual vitality may be related to the dissolution of his over-excited faith in the charismata.

On 13th and 14th March Erskine was in Edinburgh to attend meetings at which four representatives of the Catholic Apostolic Church in London spoke, including three apostles, John Bate Cardale, Henry Drummond and Nicholas Armstrong, and also Dr. James Thompson, who the following year was ordained Chief of Pastors. Erskine described some of the proceedings:

I heard him [Dr. Thompson] speak twice in the chapel, besides meeting him once (unintentionally) in private. I heard Mr. Armstrong preach once. I heard also several utterances through Mr. Cardale and Mr. Drummond, which were very striking, and to which, with two exceptions, my conscience witnessed fully; but whether the power by which they spoke was really the power of God or not, I feel myself perfectly incompetent to say. I have a witness within me which, I am conscious, tries truth; but I do not know a witness within me which tries power. I have once already yielded myself to the acknowledgement of a power, mainly on the credit of the truth uttered by the power, and I have felt that this was sin, and that it was laid upon me to take nothing as of God, except from Himself and in His own light. ²⁷

The distinction drawn by Erskine here between "truth" and "power" is that between something which is true whoever may be saying it, and something true spoken by God Himself. Erskine admitted that most of the utterances he heard at the meetings were true, comporting with Scripture; but whether they were actually spoken in the power of God, by God's inspiration, he confessed himself "perfectly incompetent to say". The utterers were claiming not merely to be speaking the truth, which most of us claim most of the time, but to be speaking as God's inspired mouthpieces, which meant that everything they said under alleged inspiration was true, whether or not Erskine felt it was. Here was Erskine's problem: could he accept this claim about the status of these men? His mind was doubtless haunted by spectres of newspapers and failed predictions as he asked himself this question.

Erskine's worst fears about the Catholic Apostolic Church were confirmed by what Dr. Thompson said at the meetings. Thompson had evidently imbibed the spirit of Irvingite ecclesiasticism in its fulness, and informed the meeting that Christ was to be found only in the due ordinances of the Church. For the Catholic Apostolic Church he claimed special status, calling Christians of all other denominations to enter its divine portals and to submit implicitly to the guidance of its apostles, prophets, pastors and elders. He admitted no right of individual judgment against the authority of the Spirit's voice speaking through the Catholic Apostolic hierarchy. Erskine's response to this was negative and critical; "I feel as if there were a deep Popery in their system", he complained.²⁸

What I heard from Dr. Thompson, both in public and private, seemed to be at variance with all that I know and feel of the first elementary principles of true religion. In his zeal for a church, he seemed to me to

lose sight of the individual personality of that intercourse with God through His Spirit within us, which is the basis, and the only basis, of religion. He frequently repeated that Christ was only to be met with in the church, and that the light in man only answered to the ministrations of the ordained ministers in the church. I know that this is not so. But if it were so, how could I even be in a condition to discern the true church? They say, "Come into the church and you will see." The first step, according to this direction, must be made in the dark ... I feel the desolateness of being without a church; I feel the weakness and meagreness, and selfishness and speculativeness, that arise from our isolated condition; but I dare take nothing for granted in this weighty matter, and I feel very jealous of the urgency with which the teachers of that church cry down the sovereignty of the internal witness of the light in every man, and claim submission to themselves on the ground of utterances which need a further evidence, and which do not carry to my mind any character distinguishing them in kind from other utterances which have been manifested to be delusive ... I feel certain that the individual personality of religion is not to be lost or diminished, but strengthened and confirmed, by a church; and it is by our connection with Christ that we are to be brought into a church, and not by our connection with a church that we are to be brought into Christ.²⁹

Erskine felt that the essence of New Testament religion was personal first-hand knowledge of God, so that the believer inwardly recognised the voice of God whenever God spoke to him. There was no room for submission to external spiritual authority; that would be a return to the Old Testament. The glory of the Christian dispensation was the believer's emancipation from external authority so as to become inner-directed by a personal intercourse with God in the depths of his own spirit. Commenting on HEBREWS I and 2, with their contrast between the angels through whom the Mosaic economy was ordained

and Christ the Mediator of the new covenant, Erskine wrote:

The dispensation of Christ embraces in it a oneness with the mind of God - not merely a readiness to do His will when we know it, but a participation in His mind, so that, by a participation in the Divine nature, we enter into the reasons of His will, and do not merely obey the authority of His will. If I had a person living in the house with me, so gifted by God that, when he was asked whether the will of God were so and so in any case, he always returned an answer of truth in the power of the Spirit, I should in such circumstances have it always in my power to know the will of God, and I might continually obey it in the spirit of ready submission; and yet I should be living in the low dispensation of angels or statutes, and out of the dispensation of the Son or of principles, if this were my only way of learning the will of God. 30

It was better to understand the principles of God's will and make an individual decision on that basis, than to be explicitly guided by external voices. The former meant being a friend and child of God, the latter merely a slave. Here, then, was Erskine's basis for rejecting the voice of charismatic prophecy: it had assumed an authoritarian form which led believers back into the externalistic bondage of the Mosaic economy, destroying the individual and filial nature of new covenant faith. The Christian believer was to receive as from God only what he himself clearly perceived to be so in his own spiritual consciousness; he was not to submit implicitly to any purported voice of God through prophecy or church hierarchy, but to test all things and accept only what evoked his intelligent assent by its intrinsic light.

Some time later, in a letter to Christian, Erskine expanded on this theme with greater clarity and fluency. Referring

to the Catholic Apostolic leaders, he wrote:

They teach that the discerning of spirits is not in the members of the church, but in the pastor, and therefore if the pastor says that the spirit in anyone is the spirit of God, the flock are bound to acknowledge and obey it. If the pastor is not sure, there is an appeal to London, - and thus the Papacy appears to be repeated in this machinery. It is evidently understood throughout, that the spirit is taken for granted by a great majority of the worshippers, for that they do not know the spirit by any certain personal knowledge, but on the authority of the officers of the church. Now, read John xiv.16, 17 and consider that the great majority of the church are by this system placed in the condition of the world, "which seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him," and therefore cannot receive Him. Surely those that receive Him merely on the authority of their pastor do not see Him nor know Him, and therefore cannot receive Him, according to the Scripture sense of the word receive .²¹

Again we see the accusation of Romanism. Erskine had never had any time for the Church of Rome, and the conviction that the Catholic Apostolic Church was repeating Rome's ecclesiological errors provided him with a strong emotional impetus for distancing himself from that body.

We also learn in this letter that the MacDonald brothers had written to Erskine warning him against the Catholic Apostolic Church. Here was another unlooked-for weapon in the laird of Linlathen's growing stock of anti-Irvingite armoury: a schism between the charismatics of Port Glasgow and London. Fortunately the biographer of the MacDonalds has preserved their sentiments on this matter and we may quote from them here. The MacDonalds rejected the Catholic Apostolic Church because they could not accept the notion of a restored apostolate. Regarding the new

apostles they said:

we see this rather as a snare which the devil has laid for those among whom the Lord was really working, to undo and bring confusion on the whole.³²

Their reason for rejecting the restored apostolate seems to have been its inability to perform miracles; presumably they had in mind HEB. 2:4 and 2 COR. 12:12. They also made criticisms of the ecclesiasticism of the London group, similar to those of Erskine:

with them the eye has been turned to ordinances and a church, instead of Jesus Christ the head and fulness of all these. These have become, we much fear, instead of channels of life, but as a veil to interpose between the soul and Christ. Of the truth of this we are fully convinced, and fear much that the end will be accordingly; the form without the power.³³

The MacDonalds also complained that the London charismatics were downgrading the authority of Scripture by placing prophecy on a par with it. They expostulated with their English brethren on this point:

One great source of your error is the place given to the word spoken, as if it were of equal authority with the written word, the Scriptures of truth ... there is implied in the very command to judge what is said by the prophet, a warning of the possibility of his being deceived. With the written word this cannot be ... ³⁴

These views they communicated to Erskine, avowing that "the Spirit amongst them had testified against the London mission",³⁵ which had the unintended effect distancing

Erskine still further from all things charismatic. Where was that unity of the Spirit Erskine had hoped for, when prophets prophesied against prophets? "Strange things - spirit against spirit," he wrote, with a note of weary detachment beginning to creep into his voice.³⁶

Erskine tried to persuade a number of his friends who had joined the Catholic Apostolic Church of what he felt was the grave spiritual defectiveness of that body. In particular, he penned a long letter to William Tate of Greenock, an acquaintance both of his own and of McLeod Campbell, in which the essence of his disagreement with the Catholic Apostolic Church emerges very clearly:

There is a faith which receives God at second-hand, so to speak, but this is not the faith of the new covenant, for by it we are no longer servants, but sons ... This outward faith which acknowledged God's appointments and ordinances, but did not meet Himself, is not the faith of the new covenant; it is an easier thing for the flesh, and so the flesh is always disposed to have this instead of the personal meeting with God. A conscientious devout Catholic, believing that if his Church directs him wrong, the responsibility does not lie on his soul, punctually follows the directions of his Church as God's commissioned authorised ordinance to him, and thus he has peace without undergoing the fire of the Divine presence. He is told what to do, and he does it, believing it to be the will of God declared through His regular ordinance. He acknowledges God's authority, and, believing that it resides in this ordinance, he bows to it. But this is not the faith that sees Him who is invisible. But this seems to me to be the faith which is required by that society with which you are connected, and is held sufficient by them. You seem to ask no more than that men should recognise your Divine ordination, and obey you, and when such statements as that which I have made are objected to you, your reply is that such an objection is opposed to God's revealed plan of blessing man through man. But the man in whom men are to be blessed is Christ

Jesus, who standeth at each heart and knocketh, and whatever I may hear from any mouth of flesh, though it were His own, unless I hear it inwardly from Him it profiteth me nothing ...Will you read John x., 14th and 15th verses, not in our English version, but in the original, and not as two separate verses, but as one sentence: "I know my sheep, and am known of mine, even as the Father knoweth me, and I know the Father." That is the true meaning of it. Now, think how Jesus knows the Father, whether it be at second-hand or no, and then say this is the way in which the sheep know Jesus. It is not the ordinance of Jesus that they know, but Jesus Himself, as it was not the Father's ordinance that Jesus knew, but the Father Himself, and so the true knowledge of an ordinance in the Church does not consist in discerning and acknowledging it to be of Christ's appointment, but in meeting Christ in it. This is just the distinction between the old covenant and the new, between the dispensation of messengers and the dispensation of the Son...

My dear friend, I see that you are much fixed in these things. I believe them to be delusions; I see in them a return to Judaism, and a real throwing away of the spiritual dispensation under the show of maintaining it. The true spiritual dispensation does not consist in the outward voice of God in the Church, for the Jews had that in their carnal church in the wilderness. It consists in the indwelling of the Spirit in the heart, in knowing God personally in the heart. Not that I at all mean to reject the outward voice as inconsistent with the spiritual dispensation, but I must have evidence for its reality much stronger than what at one time satisfied me. I have had much evidence against it since then.³⁷

Around the same time, Erskine wrote a similar missive to Edward Irving - the only record we possess of Erskine's personal contact with that grand, enigmatic man. It was apparently written in reply to a letter from Irving to Erskine, and contained in substance what

had become Erskine's fundamental arguments against the spiritual validity of the Catholic Apostolic Church. We need not repeat them. Erskine's appeal to Irving to change his mind was poignant:

My dear friend, what I feel in your letter is the entire annihilation by it of all true personal, spiritual religion or conscious communion with God.³⁸

Soon after Erskine wrote this letter to Irving, the latter's mortal career came to a gloomy end. Irving had left London in September 1834 on the strength of prophecies which bade him go to Scotland and preach, with the promise that he would be the instrument for converting thousands to the truth.³⁹ In late October he reached Glasgow, feverish with his last illness. There he renewed acquaintance with McLeod Campbell, who as we saw was now pastor of his own Independent church in the city. Irving's illness grew steadily worse, and he became bedridden. A prophecy assured him that he would recover from the illness, but on 7th December he died. His last words were:

If I die, I die unto the Lord.⁴⁰

Erskine's epitaph for the deceased giant is to be found in a brief note to the daughter of his erstwhile friend and father, Charles Stuart of Dunearn, dated 13th December 1834, written from Cadder:

You will have heard of the death of Irving. You cannot enter into my feelings on this event, as you did not know him or regard him as I did. He has been a remarkable man, in a remarkable age. He was a man of much child-like feeling to God, and personal dependence on Him, amidst things which may well appear unintelligible and strange in his history.⁴¹

A.J. Scott's epitaph was more emotional. Scott was now, like McLeod Campbell, pastor of his own Independent congregation, in Woolwich: on hearing of Irving's death, he wrote:

Dear, dear large-hearted, noble-minded Edward Irving has left us - has been taken, I doubt not, into a fatherly presence for his filial heart - into a living light in which all errors and darkness flee away. I should not, I am persuaded, have shed a tear in thinking of him, as I did many, but for the feeling how cruel seemed the delusion under which, with the simplicity of a child, he had come away from London and remained here, counting, as it were, the time till strength should be restored to him, and he should be a mighty instrument in the hands of God for advancing His kingdom. And now it is as it is. ⁴²

The hand of death claimed another prime actor in the pentecostal drama early in the new year. James MacDonald had been ill with pulmonary disease since October 1834, and he died on 2nd February 1835. Erskine drily commented, "The partakers in these things are now dropping off, called one after another to give in their account."⁴³ James was only thirty-four. His brother George was to follow him into the grave within seven months.

Erskine's verdict on James MacDonald was ambiguous:

He was a servant of Jesus Christ, and his trust and joy were in the Lord, and he was a witness for God ... I lived in the house with them for six weeks, I believe, and I found them a family united to God and to each other. James especially was an amiable and clean character - perfectly true. And those manifestations which I have so often witnessed in him were indeed most wonderful things and most mighty, and yet - I am thoroughly persuaded - delusive.⁴⁴

Erskine's break with the charismatic movement was thus complete, "delusive" being his ultimate and unhappy verdict. We may, for clarity's sake, analyse and sum up his rejection of that fascinating phenomenon under two heads.

- (i) Erskine rejected the movement in its general character because he felt himself forced to the conclusion that he had no way of telling whether the purportedly inspired utterances really were what they claimed to be. The credibility of the utterances had been drastically undermined for Erskine by the incident with the newspaper, when James MacDonald had frankly admitted that the newspaper report rather than the Holy Spirit was the source of his prophecy about George IV's death, and moreover that this "fleshly" utterance felt just the same in delivery as the supposedly inspired ones. Then there were the demoralising phenomena of many predictive prophecies which had failed of fulfilment. There were the recen^atations of George Pilkington, Robert Baxter and Miss Hall, who proclaimed that their utterances had been delusions. There was the schism between Port Glasgow and London over the issue of apostles, in which prophets denounced each other in the Spirit. Total scepticism was the result on Erskine's part. Inspired utterance became a barren practice when one had no sure criterion for discriminating the genuine instances, if there were any, from the counterfeit ones, of which there seemed all too many. Erskine had looked to the charismatic movement to unite and revitalise the Church; instead he found fragmentation and confusion in ever increasing measure. Erskine could not at the end of the day believe that such a perplexing and unedifying phenomenon could be

of God.

- (ii) Erskine rejected the movement in the particular form it assumed in the Catholic Apostolic Church because he felt that that form was inconsistent with the nature of New Testament religion. The Catholic Apostolic hierarchy of apostles, prophets and elders required of their followers an implicit faith in the inspired status of their teachings, denying the right of private judgment. "Dear brother, you are not called on to judge the word [viz. the utterance] , but to obey your pastor", said one of the London elders as reported by Erskine.⁴⁵ This to Erskine was a servile bondage to human authority, incompatible with the Spirit-filled and inner-directed sonship into which all New Testament believers were baptised, through the fulness of revelation in Christ and the gift of the Spirit in the heart of each believer. Possessing thus the mind of God, Christians were to live in the maturity of sons, making their own judgments and decisions based on the plenitude and finality of the new covenant, and not to submit with implicit faith to the authority of any man. Erskine's Protestantism was never more in evidence than here, and it is deeply significant that the charge he constantly made against the Catholic Apostolic Church was that of Romanism. Erskine may have passed beyond the limits of Evangelicalism, but into Romanism he would never go.

Erskine signalled this change of mind about the charismatic movement in an appendix to his book on Election, published in 1837. The appendix speaks for itself.

In two former publications of mind, the one entitled, a Tract on the Gifts of the Spirit,

- the other, the Brazen Serpent, - I have expressed my conviction, that the remarkable manifestations which I witnessed in certain individuals in the West of Scotland, about eight years ago, were the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, of the same character as those of which we read in the New Testament. Since then, however, I have come to think differently, and I do not now believe that they were so.

But I still continue to think, that to any one whose expectations are formed by, and founded on, the declarations of the New Testament, the disappearance of those gifts from the church must be a greater difficulty than their re-appearance could possibly be.

I think it but just to add, that though I no longer believe that those manifestations were the gifts of the Spirit, my doubts as to their nature have not at all arisen from any discovery, or even suspicion, of imposture in the individuals in whom they have appeared. On the contrary, I can bear testimony that I have not often in the course of my life met with men more marked by native simplicity and truth of character, as well as by godliness, than James and George M'Donald, the two first in whom I witnessed those manifestations.

Both these men are now dead, and they continued, I know, to their dying hour, in the confident belief that the work in them was of the Holy Ghost. I mention this for the information of the reader, who may feel interested in their history, although it is a fact which does not influence my own conviction on the subject.

To some it may appear as if I were assuming an importance to myself, by publishing my change of opinion; but I am in truth only clearing my conscience, which requires me thus publicly to withdraw a testimony which I had publicly given, when I no longer believe it myself. 46

(ii) Domestic ills and solitude at Cadder

The main interest of the years 1835 - 7 to the biographer of Erskine lies in the fact that these were the years in which his weighty volume on the doctrine of election was conceived and composed. He mentioned his writing it in his letters for this period. There are two references, both in letters written from Cadder House, the home of his sister Christian, where he stayed for the greater part of 1837 in almost complete isolation. The first of these references comes in an epistle to A.J. Scott, dated 21st April 1837:

I am getting on very slowly with my work, but I am getting on. I often feel fettered by not feeling myself permitted more plainly and fully to introduce the final purpose of God towards all men, as the explanation of His present dealings with them. For instance, I am at this moment at the expression, "Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it?" etc.¹

There follows an exposition of this verse in accordance with Erskine's conditional concept of election, but we need not explore this at present. The second reference is found in a letter to Christian, who at the time was staying in the south of England; it is dated 23rd June 1837:

I propose, as soon as I have finished my book and received Davie home, to go south. I am writing my conclusion, and I find it very difficult to say what I wish to say, without giving more offence than is necessary. From the way in which the first half of the book was written - by fits and starts - I am afraid that it will have very great faults as a work. It is also deficient in arrangement and in proportion; which will make it drag in the reading, to all except those who are really interested in the subject. And then it is, throughout, in direct oppos-

ition to the received views of Christianity. So that I cannot doubt but that the most truly religious people in the land will be startled, and even shocked, by many things in it. And then there is not a break or a chapter in the whole book; it goes on as if in one sentence, through 550 pages; which of itself would make even the most interesting book heavy and dull ...²

It seems from the above that the work was finished sometime in July or August of 1837, and it rolled off the presses before the year's end. It is striking that devout Calvinists, firm believers in unconditional personal election, are here referred to as "the most truly religious people in the land", rather than as the deceived instruments of Satan, which they had been, in Erskine's view, during the Row controversy. This affords evidence of Erskine's return to a more balanced, tranquil state of mind. At this stage, however, we will forbear from making further comments either on Erskine's book or his own remarks about it, since the matter will be examined in some detail in our next section.

These years were also a time of great sorrow and desolation for the Erskine household, which in 1835 comprised (not counting servants) Erskine, his mother, and James and Davie Paterson and their four children. Three of the Paterson children died of various ailments between 1835 and 1836; and, far more grievous to Erskine, his mother died on 10th March 1838, while he was away in Edinburgh. By these losses the Linlathen family was halved in number in the space of little more than a year. It was also scattered from Linlathen; David Paterson, the youngest of the Paterson children and last of the three to die, expired in Clifton (possibly Clifton upon Teme, Worcester) where he had been taken by his parents for its milder climate. This was on 26th October 1836.

Erskine and Christian joined the Patersons there, and then Erskine returned by himself to Cadder in November or December to live there the life of a recluse for a year and to complete his tome on election.

The death of his mother obviously affected Erskine deeply, and he poured out his heart in letters to Rachel Erskine, John McLeod Campbell and Mrs. Machar. Although we have already quoted from these in chapter 1, section (i), some further passages will be not unprofitably transcribed. This, for instance, from Erskine's letter to McLeod Campbell:

My dear brother, - When I parted from you the other day I little thought that the first letter I should write to you would be to tell you that my affectionate and revered parent was gone hence.

I think I had mentioned to you that she had had a slight inflammatory action on her wind-pipe, but I thought nothing of it, as the Patersons thought nothing of it, and yet it was the Lord's summons to her.

On Wednesday night for the first time they apprehended danger, and on Thursday morning at half-past seven, she fell asleep.

My dear brother, I feel very thankful to be without fear concerning her soul. She was of a very nervous, agitated nature, and I had always the thought that the time of death might have been a very trying time to her, but the Lord gave her quietness of spirit, and delivered her from seeking refuge in those about her whom she loved, and taught her to lean upon Himself.³

To Mrs Machar he wrote:

My dear humble-minded affectionate mother!
Loving relations are a great gift from God.

There is something in the unweariedness of their love, and especially the love of a mother, that beautifully shows forth the heart of God; it is like nothing else. I had a place and possession in my mother's heart which no undeservingness ever put me out of. I never earned that place; God gave it me. I have often sinned against that love, and grieved it, but I could never quench it. My dear mother! The weary pilgrim is at rest in her Father's house. Her end was most peaceful. She saw the love of God as a joyful rest and portion for ever, and she fell asleep in Jesus.⁴

So passed from the scene, in the quietness of faith, the person who perhaps more than any other had shaped Erskine's religious perceptions, and predisposed him, from his earliest years, to an understanding of God in which justice and holiness were rendered almost invisible in the pre-eminent brightness of love.

It is not certain whether Erskine had already begun to compose his volume on election before he settled himself in the solitude of Cadder House at the close of 1836. What is certain is that he utilised this period of uncongenial loneliness to finish that work off. The loneliness seems to have got to Erskine very quickly; it was only 2nd January 1837 when he wrote plaintively to his old friend James MacKenzie, whom he had met and nursed to health in Rome in 1824:

I am getting into habits of great seclusion, and I feel them growing upon me, so that the besoin of human intercourse is becoming very weak, which makes me sometimes wish a friend's face, not merely to gratify an affection, but to break a habit and awaken a torpid faculty.⁵

He virtually pled with MacKenzie to visit him, promising

that he would keep him "as warm as a pie here".⁶ In still more plaintive vein he wrote to A.J. Scott on 21st April:

I have been living perfectly alone since ever I returned from Clifton. I took influenza almost immediately, and have been confined a tolerably close prisoner till the present time, in a house full of remembrances and shadows, but inhabited only by myself and two or three servants, with whom I have the fellowship of great kindness.⁷

Erskine was the opposite of a recluse by nature, and felt the unsocial conditions at Cadder House as a sore trial.

Erskine's reading during the time of his composing The Doctrine of Election is very interesting and revealing. He exercised his linguistic capacities in reading the Old Testament in Hebrew:

I am reading the Hebrew Bible with greater ease now; I am reading Genesis - what a wonderful history! What an impression it leaves of there being something under that simplicity of an immense magnitude and depth.⁸

Erskine may not have been regarded by men like Andrew Thomson as a competent Biblical linguist, but he knew his Greek and Hebrew well enough to read the Bible in its autographic tongue. At less exalted levels, he twice mentions the correspondence of Alexander Knox and Bishop Jebb, "in which there are many most interesting things",⁹ although he was later to criticise Knox for his "ignorance of the meaning of the atonement"¹⁰ and for the fact that worldly men could apparently read and enjoy Knox's religious writings ("It seems to me to imply a great defect in any work on religion, that it should be able to be

read by those who walk without God, and to be read with pleasure by them."¹¹) Knox (1757 - 1831) had combined a high Episcopalian view of church and sacraments with an emphasis on warmth of personal religious feeling and devotedness to God, in which latter point he admired Wesley and the Methodists. It would have been this more Evangelical and spiritual strain in Knox that appealed to Erskine. In addition he may have found Knox temperamentally attractive, since Knox, like Erskine, seems at bottom to have been an eclectic and individualist in his religious thinking.

Platonism formed a central element in Erskine's reading at this juncture. For a start, we find him perusing the Select Discourses of John Smith and "some treatises" of Henry More.¹² Smith (1618 - 52) and More (1614 - 87) both belonged to that circle known as the Cambridge Platonists, a body of seventeenth century English divines distinguished by their reaction against Puritan Calvinism in favour of the Greek Fathers and Plotinus. They particularly extolled the virtues of Reason, which they interpreted as an inner light connecting men with God and the eternal truths of morality; "the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord" was their favourite text (PROV. 20:27). Erskine himself was arguably a nineteenth century Scottish version of a Cambridge Platonist, with his own characteristic emphasis on morality, the seed of spiritual life in all men, the reasonableness of Christianity, and the continuity between natural and supernatural. Erskine approvingly quoted to A.J. Scott a passage from More in which More expounded his concept of "Divine Sagacity", a universal principle "more noble and inward than reason itself", which elevated reason to "contemplations of the highest concernment"¹³—reminiscent of Coleridge's distinction between Reason, which intuits moral and spiritual realities, and Understanding, which operates in the mat-

erial sphere. Erskine thought it a "striking" notion¹⁴, and although he had probably finished his dissertation on election by this point, we will see the idea of an immediate inner consciousness of spiritual truths playing a significant role in its arguments. He had indeed already employed the idea to good effect in his quarrel with the Catholic Apostolic Church, repudiating its claims, as we saw, because it exalted the authority of its own apostles and prophets above "the sovereignty of the internal witness of the light in every man".¹⁵

Still more Platonic, Erskine read Plato himself, specifically the Gorgias. He found it an illuminating experience:

I have been reading Plato with immense interest and astonishment. In Gorgias I find the doctrine of the atonement in its principle applied to the conscience, better than in any religious book I ever read. I mean the principle of "accepting punishment," which is the fond of the doctrine.¹⁶

The passage to which Erskine refers in the Gorgias is one in which Plato represents Socrates as arguing for the essentially beneficial nature of punishment for evil-doing; its true and proper effect is to "cure" the evil-doer. The relevant passages are not long and may be transcribed:

SOCRATES. Does a man who punishes rightly punish justly?

POLUS. Yes.

SOCRATES. And is his action just or unjust?

POLUS. Just.

SOCRATES. Then the man who is punished for an offence is treated justly?

POLUS. Obviously.

SOCRATES. And we have agreed that what is just is fine?

POLUS. Certainly.

SOCRATES. Then the man who punishes does a fine thing, and the man who is punished has a fine thing done to him.

POLUS. Yes.

SOCRATES. And if fine, good, since it must be either pleasant or useful.

POLUS. Inevitably.

SOCRATES. Then the treatment received by the man who is punished is good?

POLUS. Apparently.

SOCRATES. Then it must be a benefit to him?

POLUS. Yes.

SOCRATES. And is the benefit what I take it to be, that if he is justly punished his soul is improved?

POLUS. Probably.

SOCRATES. Then the man who is punished is freed from badness of soul?

POLUS. Yes.

SOCRATES. In that case, is he not freed from the worst of all bad things? ... Then we shall have no use for oratory, Polus, as a means of defence either for our own misdeeds or for those of our parents or friends or children or country. It may however be of service if one adopts the contrary view and holds it to be a man's duty to denounce himself in the first place for his misdeeds and next any of his family or friends who may do wrong, bringing the crime out of concealment into the light of day in order that the wrongdoer may be punished and regain his health. Such a man must force himself and others not to play the coward, but to submit to the law with closed eyes like a man, as one would to surgery or cautery, ignoring the pain for the sake of the good result which it will bring. Whatever the punishment which the crime deserves he must offer himself to it cheerfully, whether it be flogging or imprisonment or a fine or banishment or death. He must be the first to accuse himself and members of his family, and the use that he will make of oratory will be to ensure that by having their misdeeds brought to light wrongdoers are delivered from the supreme evil of wickedness.¹⁷

Here, then, in Plato, Erskine found a prophetic setting forth of what he conceived to be the Christian doctrine of the atonement. Christ, the representative head of humanity, offered Himself cheerfully to the punishment which humanity's crime merited - this punishment being beneficent, not vindictive, in intention - in order that the members of His family, the rest of the human race, might follow in His footsteps, submit to suffering and death, and be cured of all evil thereby.

Some confusion attaches to the question when Erskine first made acquaintance with Plato's Gorgias. The letter to A.J. Scott from which we quoted above reads as if Erskine had just perused Gorgias for the first time - "with immense interest and astonishment". However, later in life, Erskine told a somewhat different story to Bishop Alexander Ewing. According to Ewing, Erskine said:

Penalty is a blessing; we must never seek to get rid of penalty; God never dispenses with penalty. I got that first from the Gorgias of Plato. It was the first light I got as to the meaning of suffering or punishment. 18

Erskine and Ewing knew each other from 1860 onwards. The non-retributive interpretation of punishment appears in the Brazen Serpent, in particular with regard to the suffering of Christ. But the Brazen Serpent was published in 1831; Erskine's report to A.J. Scott about his reading of Gorgias comes in 1837. How, then, can Erskine have been correct in telling Bishop Ewing that it was from Gorgias that he first understood the true, beneficial nature of punishment, since this understanding had already appeared in Brazen Serpent?

Unless Erskine simply contradicted himself, the answer

must be that his 1837 reading of Gorgias was not his first, and that his "immense interest and astonishment" were the rekindling of feelings experienced on a previous occasion. On the other hand, Erskine's remark to Bishop Ewing was made some thirty years after the letter to Scott; Erskine's memory may have been playing tricks on him, and he may have been attributing to Plato something he had actually worked out for himself. This seems possible given the unique and almost unbounded admiration which Erskine felt for Plato in later years. "I have never taken up any dialogue of Plato without getting more from it than from any book not in the Bible", he wrote to F.J.A. Hort, an Anglican textual scholar, in 1850.¹⁹ A contemporary remarked of him that "his 'two books' were Plato and the Bible".²⁰ This was certainly true of Erskine in the latter part of his life - the part commencing approximately at the point of his writing The Doctrine of Election. In the words of his friend, Dr. Richard Low:

His favourites among the ancients were Homer and Plato. He read the Iliad through continuously, finishing about the year 1838. Plato engaged much of his leisure time during the rest of his life.²¹

Erskine even claimed in a letter to John Young in 1867 that it was from Plato's Gorgias that he first understood justification by faith:

If you know the Gorgias of Plato, you will understand me when I say that I learned the meaning of justification by faith from that dialogue, before I saw it in St. Paul.²²

One begins to wonder what else Erskine learnt from Gorgias! He pursued the matter in his posthumously published The

Spiritual Order, where again he claimed that he derived his "first clear conception" of the true meaning of justification by faith not from Paul but from "another heroic apostle to the Gentiles", Socrates, in the Gorgias:

It might be somewhat startling to such persons to hear any one say that the first clear conception he had come to of this doctrine of justification by faith, was derived from the reported conversations of another heroic apostle to the Gentiles, whose name has escaped all suspicion of cant or conventionality amongst succeeding generations, although like Paul he was condemned by his contemporaries as a setter forth of strange gods. In the dialogue concerning Rhetoric Socrates is represented by Plato as discussing with Gorgias the meaning and value of his art. Gorgias explains that it consisted in such a knowledge of the use of words as would enable those who possessed it to secure to themselves a favourable judgment from any tribunal before which they might have to appear. Socrates puts the question whether the guilt or innocence of the party was a circumstance of any importance in the matter, to which Gorgias answers, that without art on either side the right would probably prevail, but that the excellence of his teaching lay in this, that even the supporter of a wrong cause - the criminal who deserved punishment - if he used that teaching skilfully, would come off victorious. Socrates then suggests the inquiry whether it is really for the advantage of a man who is guilty that he should escape unpunished, - whether, on the supposition that the laws are really good, that is, wisely framed for the right education of the people, it can possibly be profitable for any one to evade their proper operation, and whether it would not on the whole be the best course for a man to pursue when he felt himself guilty, to present himself to the judge and crave punishment; and further when he knew any of his friends to be in this position, whether it would not be the truest friendship to urge or even to constrain them to do the same.

There is exquisite humour in the proposal, but there is a deep principle contained in

it which is at the root of all righteousness. To pursue such a course would be possible only on the condition of absolute faith in the rightness of the laws and in the beneficial working of punishments awarded by them; but it is evident that no man could be in perfect accord with the laws of his country who was not prepared to follow out the proposal.

The absolute wisdom of any human government, either in the enactment of laws or in their execution, must always be doubtful; and therefore an undoubting acceptance of them and submission to them, as an education in righteousness, is not to be expected, and might not always be profitable. But if there be a God, if there be an infinitely wise Governor of the universe, His dealings with men must always be intended to constitute such an education, and any one who really believes in God, and who at the same time really desires righteousness, is then only acting in consistency with this desire, and also with the highest reason, when he commits himself in entire confidence to His guidance and fully accepts all His providential dealings. This confiding state is the right state for a man to be in, and the entire and detailed righteousness necessarily resulting from it would be most properly named "the righteousness of faith."²³

This is revealing, because Erskine is here referring us to the same passage in Gorgias from which he claimed in his remark to Bishop Ewing that he first comprehended the beneficial nature of punishment. We see, then, how Plato forged the connection between this and justification by faith in Erskine's mind: a man is justified, that is, put in his right relationship to God, by submitting to God's providential dealings with him, which include suffering and death (punishment), in a spirit of utter confidence that God is bringing him thereby to moral maturity. Faith is thus correlated with the beneficial punitive providence of God, the result being justification, or a right relationship with God. This, Erskine claims, he learned from Gorgias.

The relationship between Erskine and Plato would make a fascinating and possibly lengthy study in itself; but we must now move on and examine the other facets of Erskine's varied reading during his solitude in Cadder.

If Erskine found Plato edifying, it is not surprising that he discovered merit in the writings of the converted neo-Platonist, Augustine of Hippo. He mentions this in his April epistle to A.J. Scott:

I have also been reading Augustine with pleasure, and finding in him not only living water, but also many things in his forms of thought and interpretation, much more real and less conventional than the system of those who have built upon his foundation. ²⁴

The closing remark presumably refers to Calvinistic theology, which has broadly followed Augustine's anthropology and soteriology.

From Augustine we turn to glance at another Platonist, Frederick Denison Maurice, who in 1837 sent Erskine a number of the letters which later formed his volume The Kingdom of Christ. These letters, addressed to Maurice's Quaker friend Samuel Clark on the subject of the true nature of the church, were published separately at first during 1837, and then at the end of the year were gathered together into the one volume. Maurice, whose life and theology has attracted considerable attention and occasioned the writing of a fair number of books and articles, was a great admirer of Erskine, dedicating to him his Prophets and Kings of the Old Testament in 1856, in which dedication we find the following passage:

Have we a Gospel for men, for all men?
Is it a Gospel that God's will is a will
to all Good, a will to deliver them from

all Evil? Is it a Gospel that He has reconciled the world unto Himself? Is it this absolutely, or this with a multitude of reservations, explanations, contradictions? ... It is more than twenty years since a book of yours The Brazen Serpent brought home to my mind the conviction that no Gospel but this can be of any use to the world, and that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is such a one.²⁵

Maurice wrote to Erskine about this dedication that

I wished to tell others how much I believe they, as well as I, owe to your books; how they seem to me to mark a crisis in the theological movements of this time.²⁶

Maurice's acquaintance with Erskine as a theologian began with The Brazen Serpent. His reading of this innovatory Christological treatise prompted him to write to his sister about Erskine:

The peculiarities of his system may be true or not, but I am certain a light has fallen through him on the Scriptures, which I hope I shall never lose, and the chief tendency I feel he has awakened in my mind is to search them more and more.²⁷

Later, having made Erskine's personal acquaintance, Maurice's estimate of the laird of Linlathen was little short of hagiographic:

He is so gentle and truthful and loving; the best man I think I ever knew...²⁸

Maurice's personal relationship with Erskine, however, falls outside the chronological scope of this thesis,

occupying as it did the latter years of Erskine's life, and cannot here be examined in detail. The two men met in 1838; Erskine described Maurice after this initial encounter as

a very metaphysical man; I have not got into him yet; I hope, when I return to London, to know him better.²⁹

The hope materialised, and the two became personal friends and devoted admirers of one another's life and work. We have seen this in regard to Maurice; Erskine, for his part, wrote to Maurice concerning the latter's Doctrine of Sacrifice, published in 1854:

I cannot help writing to say how thankful I feel to God that such words are spoken to our generation, and that they are words of truth and soberness ...³⁰

Regarding the letters on the church which Maurice sent him in 1837, later collected in The Kingdom of Christ, Erskine was also positive in his appreciation.

I am much obliged to Mr. Maurice for sending these letters, which contain much precious matter. I do not think I ever saw an example of so high an appreciation of objective and formal Christianity joined with such a true sense of the value of what is subjective. In fact, no one can value the objective correctly who does not know the value of the subjective; for it is the subjective only that is valuable, and the other is valuable as conducting to it.³¹

Maurice, Erskine felt, had achieved the right proportions between objective and subjective, doctrine and life, truth and holiness. The latter components of these pairs were,

of course, what Erskine had always valued, even using their presence as a criterion of the correctness of the former components. A doctrine could be known to be objectively true if the natural result of believing it was an increase in personal moral goodness. This is what we have designated Erskine's "ethical pragmatism", evident in his writings from Salvation (1816), his earliest work.

One wonders whether the presence of Plato can be detected even here, in Erskine's affirmative attitude to the theology of Maurice. Platonism was a profound and pervasive feature of Maurice's doctrinal scheme; reality he defined in terms of the ideas behind the facts, and these were eternal, part of a changeless divine order. Salvation itself he threw back into this eternal order. In the words of Maurice's modern expositor and critic, Torben Christensen:

The events of salvation, which are recorded in the Bible, are relegated, so to speak [by Maurice], to eternity and regarded as eternal, unchangeable truths, which are subsequently revealed in time and space through a specific history of revelation ... Not for a moment did he cast doubt upon the fact that Christ truly became man and died upon the cross. But whereas the New Testament writers understood this event as the entry of the new order of redemption and salvation into this world living under the bondage of sin, death and the Devil, Maurice saw it as the manifestation of an eternal reality. The Platonic conception of reality was such a self-evident truth for him, that, with intuitive, almost somnambulistic mastery, he redrafted the Biblical history of salvation by eliminating all traits of uniqueness.³²

This, Christensen argues, was the natural outworking of Maurice's fundamental Platonism:

With extraordinary talent he had, so to speak,
set out to unite Plato and the Bible ...³³

Much of this could have been written of the later Erskine, especially the Erskine of The Doctrine of Election.

We have already seen Erskine's tendency to make salvation history simply the unfolding of eternal truths; particularly with respect to The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel, we saw how he wished to remove forgiveness and, in effect, justification from the temporal order and make them eternal realities in God's character. It may be, then, that Plato formed the underlying bond of attraction between Erskine and Maurice.

It is possible that it was during his solitude in Cadder House that Erskine first read Thomas Carlyle. In May 1838 he referred to Carlyle's Sartor Resartus and French Revolution as works with which he was familiar.³⁴ Sartor Resartus first appeared in serial form in Fraser's Magazine between November 1831 and August 1834, although the first separate English edition only appeared in 1838; French Revolution was published in three volumes in July 1837. It is likely that Erskine read at least the latter sometime in 1837. Again, Erskine's relationship with Carlyle falls outside the chronological range of this thesis in its development and detail, so we can touch on it only lightly. Suffice it to record that Erskine's literary acquaintance with Edward Irving's boyhood friend became a personal friendship of much warmth on both sides, so that Erskine could say of Carlyle:

I love the man ... he has a real belief in the invisible, which in these railroad and steam-engine days is a great matter. He sees and condemns the evil and baseness of living in the lower part of our nature instead of living in the higher. He is full of thoughts, of genius, and of high imagination.³⁵

In Sartor Resartus Erskine particularly appreciated "the chapter on natural supernaturalism" - "a wonderful thing".³⁶ As its title suggests, the chapter seeks to undermine the distinction between the ordinary and the miraculous by arguing that men would feel as much wonder at the former as at the latter if it were not for the dulness bred by familiarity, and that a so-called miracle might be just as much an expression of undiscovered natural principles as so-called ordinary phenomena are of principles we think we have discovered. This fitted in well with Erskine's own predilection for blending nature and supernature, especially in the aftermath of his charismatic disillusionment.

Carlyle for his part is reported by his biographer Froude as having "much esteemed" Erskine,³⁷ referring to him facetiously as "Evidence Erskine" after his Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion.³⁸ George Gilfillan of Dundee, a clerical acquaintance of Erskine's, spent a morning with Erskine and Carlyle in 1850, walking by the sea near Linlathen, and recorded his impression of the two men thus:

It was fine to find their deep and eternal dissimilarities mellowed and softened into harmony, and to hear the concert formed between the meek, low voice of the one, and the strong yet still and melancholy accents of the other. It was the flute accompanying the sea. I could not thoroughly sympathise with either, but I loved and - shall I add? - pitied both. I suspect I was repaid in kind.³⁹

In their common old age, Carlyle wrote to Erskine with what for such a turbulent spirit was an unusual tenderness:

Dear Mr. Erskine, good be ever with you.
Were my hand as little shaky as it is today,

I would write to you oftener. A word from
you will be ever welcome here!⁴⁰

The friendship between two such different minds seems odd: Erskine the devout Christian, convinced of God's redeeming love to all men as the quintessential reality; Carlyle the religious eclectic, who disbelieved Christianity, could not attain to a clear conviction of God's personalness, and exalted the Hero in Nietzschean fashion. Perhaps it says something about Erskine's growing theological latitude that he could find a kindred spirit in such a man.

Finally, it is probable that Erskine read through Jonathan Edwards' Freedom of the Will at this period, since he makes reference to it in his volume on election, and enters into specific criticism of Edwards' position. But we will notice this in our examination of The Doctrine of Election, which forms our next section. To this task we now pass.

(iii) The Doctrine of Election

The Doctrine of Election, by Erskine's own admission, is a long, rambling and disjointed work (easily his longest), almost as unreadable as The Brazen Serpent - saved, perhaps, from the sheer dulness of that previous work by the calmer, more spacious atmosphere which pervades Erskine's final literary offering to the Christian reading public. He was now no longer in the grip of the fevered mentality induced by the Row controversy, the charismatic movement, and the expectation of Christ's imminent return. This enabled him to write with something of his old tranquillity of pace and expression. Although Election and

Brazen Serpent remain similar in their general deficiency in structure, the result of the different emotional tone is that where the Brazen Serpent sometimes sounds like the rantings of an enthusiast, Election seems more like the talkativeness of a sincere if rather diffuse amateur philosopher. Erskine apologised for this in his preface:

The first half of this book was written under the disadvantage of frequent interruptions, which I am sensible have very often broken the thread of thought and interest; and with regard to the entire work, it has happened, chiefly I confess from my own fault, that every sheet was printed as soon as it was written, so that I never saw it, nor could judge of it, as a whole, until the last sheet came from the press.¹

Owing to the daunting size of Election and its tendency to meander and repeat itself, we can here attempt only a broad survey of its leading ideas. These fall into three main areas: the doctrine of election itself, related matters of sin, free-will, and the work of Christ, and the question of authority in religion. We will examine these areas in that order.

The most obvious interest of Election lies precisely in the topic of its title, the doctrine of election itself. Since this is normally, if perhaps unfairly, regarded as the distinctive doctrine of Calvinism, Erskine's last book can be regarded as the public literary monument to his final rejection of Calvinism as a theologically viable interpretation of Christianity. He himself puts something of this colour on it in his autobiographical account of how he came to abandon the Calvinistic conception of election. He begins with a pithy statement of that conception:

The doctrine of election generally held

[in Scotland] is, that God, according to His own inscrutable purpose, has from all eternity chosen in Christ, and predestinated unto salvation, a certain number of individuals out of the fallen race of Adam; and that, in pursuance of this purpose, as these individuals come into the world, He in due season visits them by a peculiar operation of His Spirit, thereby justifying, and sanctifying, and saving them; whilst He passes by the rest of the race, unvisited by that peculiar operation of the Spirit, and so abandoned to their sins and their punishment. ²

Then follows a biographically crucial personal confession:

I held this doctrine for many years, modified, however inconsistently, by the belief of God's love to all, and of Christ having died for all - and yet, when I look back on the state of my mind during that period, I feel that it would be truer to say, I submitted to it, than that I believed it.³

He submitted, he says, because he felt constrained so to do by ROMANS 9 and other texts, although at the same time feeling uncomfortable due to a different set of texts which he believed taught man's freedom of choice. He secretly felt that the non-elect had an excuse for their unbelief, viz. their bondage to sin and hence inability to believe. How could they be responsible to believe if unable to believe? But his profoundest misgivings, he says, were Christological:

Above all, I could not help feeling that if God were such as that doctrine described Him, then the Creator of every man was not the friend of every man, nor the righteous object of confidence to every man; and that when Christ was preached to sinners, the whole truth of God was not preached to them, for that there was something behind Christ in the mind of God, giving Him to one, and

with-holding Him from another, so that the ministry of reconciliation was only an appendix to a deeper and more dominant ministry, in which God appeared simply as a Sovereign without any moral attribute, and man was dealt with as a mere creature of necessity, without any real responsibility.⁴

Erskine used to rebuke his doubts with ROM. 9:20 - "who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing moulded will not say to the moulder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it?" - and also

by the consideration that the finite understanding of man was incapable of comprehending the infinite mind of God.⁵

But he saw that God Himself invited His creatures to examine and judge His ways; for example, EZEK. 18, with its refrain: "Yet you say, 'The way of the LORD is not right.' Hear now, O house of Israel! Is My way not right? Is it not your ways that are not right?"

It appeared to me impossible to read this passage without perceiving that the righteousness of God is assumed throughout to be a righteousness which man is capable of comprehending and appreciating - and that although His sovereignty is incontestable, He yet, in a manner, holds Himself accountable to the consciences of His intelligent creatures, for the way in which He exercises it.⁶

Moreover, this text teaches, says Erskine, that there is no reprobating purpose in God; His will is purely salvific. The distinction between righteous and unrighteous men is ascribed to their own free-will, not God's sovereignty.

The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself ... Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, rather than that he should turn from his ways and live? (EZEK. 18:20, 23).

Erskine continues his autobiographical account:

I acknowledged the force of the passages [such as EZEK. 18] - I acknowledged my inability to interpret them in consistency with the doctrine of election - I fully admitted the responsibility of man and the righteousness of God - but I could not allow any logical conclusions of my own understanding to interfere with my submission to the inspired word; and, therefore, I still felt that whilst the 9th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans continued to be an undisputed part of Divine Revelation, it would be an act of ungodly presumption in me to reject a doctrine which appeared to be so manifestly contained in it.

I felt also that there was something in the doctrine, to which my own heart bore witness, as being true to experience, as well as glorifying to God, namely, that there was nothing good in man but what was of the direct acting of the Spirit of God; and therefore I could not receive any argument against the doctrine which proceeded on the ground of an inherent self-quickenning power in man.⁷

The experiential element mentioned here was crucial. We will see later how Erskine reinterpreted it.

Erskine then speaks of how the parable of the potter in JER. 18 helped him to a new understanding of election, which we have already recorded from his letter to Mrs.

Montagu in 1832 (see section (i) of this chapter). Erskine's point is basically that the parable teaches God's right to reject a bad pot and remake it, to reject a people (e.g. the Jews) if they do not follow His purpose in raising them up. It does not teach God's right to make men good or evil, which Erskine considered the Calvinistic view.⁸ What God in fact rejects, Erskine says, is the unspiritual mind, signified by the spoilt pot; but it is within man's power to repent of his own unspirituality, in which case God will no longer reject him, as Jeremiah teaches in this chapter (vv. 7, 8). Erskine thus applies election and rejection essentially to states of mind rather than to individuals: election applies to the righteous and godly state of mind, rejection or reprobation to the unrighteous and ungodly state of mind.

But what are the sources of these states of mind as they appear in individuals? Erskine's answer, in brief, is: the individual will in conjunction with Adam or Christ. With regard to Adam and Christ, he says:

The first Adam was created for glory, honour, and immortality, as God's vicegerent upon the earth; but by following his own will, separate from and independent of God's will, he was rejected and fell under the sentence of degradation and death, becoming thus a vessel unto dishonour. And the second Adam, by following not his own will but the will of the Father, and accepting the punishment of death, as the Father's righteous judgment on the flesh, was raised from the dead to a glorious immortality, as the Father's vicegerent, instead of the first Adam, becoming thus a vessel unto honour. This is the Reprobation and the Election.⁹

Then follows an allegory of the first and second kings of the Israelites, Saul and David. Saul was rejected from office for his disobedience; David was chosen for

his godliness. But although rejected by God, Saul was not immediately removed from his position as king. Thus two kings, the rejected and the elected, existed alongside each other in Israel.

The nation thus had two heads, and every individual in the nation might choose to which of these heads he would give his heart and adherence. And according to their choice, so was it unto them; those who followed the reprobate head partook in his reprobation, and those who followed the elect head partook of his election.¹⁰

This Erskine then applies to Adam, Christ, and humanity:

The first Adam, who is the antitype of Saul, is rejected like him from the favour of God, and from being king; but like Saul he is not taken out of the way, he is permitted to retain his power: the flesh still reigns. The second Adam, who is the true David, is elected into his place, and honoured with the favour of God, and with the kingly office; but his power is not yet manifested; he is still, like David, seeking where to lay his head. Both these kings are in the world, the flesh and the spirit - the reprobate head and the elect head; and every individual may identify himself with the one or the other, according to his own choice. Those who follow the flesh partake in its reprobation, those who follow the spirit partake of its election. ¹¹

All else that Erskine has to say about election flows from, or is simply a variation of, this fundamental conception: God rejected Adam for his disobedience, and insofar as we share in Adam's disobedience, we share also in his rejection; God has chosen Christ for His obedience, and insofar as we share in His obedience, we share in His election; and it is ultimately the decision of our own free-will which of these two positions we shall occupy.

What does Erskine have to say about the various Biblical texts which Calvinists have normally seen as teaching the doctrine of an unconditional personal election to salvation? There are several loci classici. What, for instance, of the famous "golden chain" of ROM. 8:29, 30?

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined
to become conformed to the image of His Son,
that He might be the first-born among many
brethren; and whom He predestined, these
He also called; and whom He called, these
He also justified; and whom He justified,
these He also glorified.

Erskine interprets this along substantially semi-Pelagian or Arminian lines, although with peculiar twists of his own. The "foreknowing" spoken of in v.29 he denudes of any affective significance - "knowing" in the Biblical sense of "loving" or "choosing in love" - and wishes to translate it "pre-ascertain", i.e. a purely intellectual prescience. That which God pre-ascertains is the spiritual condition of the hearts of men, those who in the words of v.28 love Him and obey His purpose. In other words, God pre-ascertains that a man has rejected Adam or the flesh, and has entered into the election of Christ. Such pre-ascertaining Erskine describes as taking place in time, not eternity; it merely means to know beforehand, that is, before the next step in the spiritual process of God's dealings with the soul. Erskine goes on to interpret "predestined" as "introduced into the school of Christ - the school of willing scholars"; "called" as the summons to believers to suffer with Christ; and "justified" as resurrected at the last day. In a nutshell, according to Erskine:

Those whom God previously ascertained as
having chosen Christ by their free-will,
He appointed in the school of Christ; whom

He thus appointed, He called to suffer with Christ; whom He thus called, He raised from the dead; and these he glorified.¹²

Only the last term, "glorified", survives in its usual meaning. Erskine claims that this is the only reasonable exegesis of ROM. 8:29, 30; to the present writer, it seems rather a congeries of strained implausibilities.

Erskine also insists that no one link of this "golden chain" necessarily leads to the next:

There appears to me to be nothing absolutely fixed or irrevocable intended in this sequence. It is the substance of the hope set before the spiritually-minded, as the order of God's purpose towards them; which shall most surely be accomplished to those who maintain their spiritual-mindedness; whilst such as fall away, "shall know God's breach of promise."¹³

Having manfully disposed of ROM. 8:29, 30, Erskine devotes prolonged attention to chapter nine of Paul's epistle. We cannot enter into the details of his exegesis, save to highlight a few prominent features. Erskine's allegorical proclivities, for example, enjoy free play as he asserts that the various historical figures who appear in this chapter are merely types of the flesh and the spirit. "The elder shall serve the younger" (v. 12) means that the first Adam shall be subjected to the second. "Jacob I loved, Esau I hated" (v. 13) means that God approves of the spiritual mind and rejects the carnal. Pharaoh (v. 17) symbolises the flesh as it stubbornly resists God's universal salvific purpose. "He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires" (v. 18) means that God has mercy on the spiritual mind and hardens the carnal. And so on.¹⁴ The

whole argument of the apostle is thus interpreted as teaching a purely conditional and non-personal election and rejection, centred on states of mind.

What then of vv. 19 - 21?

You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing moulded will not say to the moulder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honourable use, and another for common use?

The normal Augustinian exegesis of v. 19 takes it as meaning, "Why does God find fault with sinners for their hardness of heart against His Word, when that hardness has been brought about by His own irresistible will?" Erskine's interpretation of the passage, however, was as follows. The objector of v. 19 is really saying:

Why doth God condemn me for actions which do not counteract His purposes, and of which He even takes advantage for accomplishing His purposes? ... The plea of the Jew for his nation, therefore is, not that God had constrained them to commit sin, but, that He had not suffered any loss by them, inasmuch as He had taken advantage of their sin, after it was committed, for the advancement of His own ends; and his inference is, that God, having thus gained His object by them, and in a manner profited by their sin, ought not, and needed not, to cast them off for it.¹⁵

In other words, Erskine alters the objection from God's finding fault with a hardness of heart effected by Himself, to God's finding fault with a hardness of heart profitably exploited by Himself. But does v. 18 not say that it

is God who hardens the heart? Yes, but this does not mean that God's will is the cause of the hardness. Referring to the example of Pharaoh in v. 17, Erskine says that God's hardening of his heart merely means God's permitting him to display the effects of his own self-induced hardness and punishing him for it. It has nothing to do with a divine spiritual operation rendering sinners stubborn to the revealed will of heaven. But what then of God's having mercy on whom He desires, which is the contrast to the hardening process? Has this nothing to do with a divine spiritual operation in the hearts of sinners? No indeed, Erskine replies, it merely refers historically to God's long-suffering in passing over Jewish iniquity, although allegorically it refers to God's decree of favour towards the spiritually minded.¹⁶

Once again one feels exegetical realities melting away in the heat of Erskine's bias and highly imaginative interpretations. One cannot but reluctantly echo the verdict of Robert Reid:

In his book on Election, Erskine failed as an exegete...¹⁷

Erskine explains away by tortuous exegesis some of the clearest passages in the Bible which relate to unconditional personal election; it seems that he has come to these verses with his mind already made up as to what they shall and shall not teach. It would, I think, have been more candid of him to admit, with such Liberal scholars as C.H. Dodd, William Barclay and John O'Neill, that ROMANS does teach predestinarian doctrine and is incredible and immoral insofar as it does so.¹⁸

This brings us to a consideration of wider doctrinal issues

in Election. The central position occupied by Adam and Christ as the Reprobate and Elect Ones, whose respective destinies we must all share, Erskine elaborates on with far-reaching significance. Adam was the head of humanity, and his fallen nature is transmitted to all his offspring, although his act of apostasy is not imputed:

The reason of death being on the race, was not that Adam's sin was charged on them, it was not the imputation of a perversion, without the actual existence of such a perversion; but it was because of a true and actual perversion communicated to them by their partaking in the nature of their first parent and head, Adam.¹⁹

Imputation, of course, being a forensic concept, must give way to substantial realities. So, as in the Brazen Serpent, Erskine interprets human nature as a single, inclusive, organic entity in which individual persons merely participate:

Let us here observe, that the human nature itself is distinct from the individual personalities that may be placed or planted in it. It is the medium through which they know, and feel, and act. They are responsible for the use which they make of it, but not for the condition in which they find it. Its condition is their trial ...²⁰

This collective organism was corrupted in its head, Adam. Was God just in allowing Adam's posterity to enter into existence in such a corrupted nature? No, replies Erskine - unless, that is, God foresaw that a greater good would come out of it, "and that eventually no one individual would fail to participate in that greater good except by his own determined rejection of it".²¹ What, then, was this greater good?

If according to the nature of things, a created mind can only rise to spiritual excellence and blessedness, by passing through a spiritual and moral conflict, which embraces sufferings and self-denial - and if there be a proportion between the amount of excellence and blessedness obtained on the one hand, and the difficulties met and overcome on the other, - then it will follow, that God is indeed only calling us to a higher holiness and blessedness, by placing us under such a condition of things as we now find ourselves under, in consequence of the fall ... 22

Erskine goes further, and virtually argues that the fall of Adam was necessary to the moral education of the race. Human nature in itself and as such has an innate tendency to self-centredness; unfallen Adam's nature "was pervaded and animated by the principle of self-gratification".¹³

For first, in the commencement of the Bible, Adam is set before us as seeking and finding enjoyment without having passed through death; but as we look at him, and follow him with our eyes in his course onwards, we find that his path terminates in ruin and corruption.²⁴

Thus God dealt with Adam to discover him to himself. The fall did not put the evil thing into his nature, it only discovered it ... But as this tendency really existed in the nature originally, it is evident that it could only have been by sacrificing it, and shedding out its blood, that Adam could have walked with God in the spirit of a child, giving obedience to His law of liberty, and finding it not grievous, and that any obedience which he rendered without such a sacrifice must have been comparatively only external and literal, not spiritual; so that even in the original state, only through death could man spiritually have come to God or obeyed Him; and it was only by the voluntary shedding out of the proper life-blood of the nature, on the part of the individuals placed in it, that a way could

have been opened for its veins being filled with the life or spirit of God.

Considered in this light, I feel constrained to regard the original condition of man as only preparatory to the dispensation with which it pleased God to follow it up; and his fall as the opening up of a way for the accomplishment of what was behind in the purpose of God towards him, by placing him under a higher dispensation.²⁵

But the organism of human nature having been corrupted in its first head, how can Adam's posterity overcome the now innate sinfulness to which they are born enslaved? Erskine concedes that it would have been unjust for God to insert any new individuals into a totally corrupted nature without enabling them to rise above it. But God has provided such ability for mankind through a new head, Jesus Christ. He introduced

within the nature itself a counterbalancing power, which the individual persons planted in it might take hold of, and so doing might pass through the sentence laid on the nature on account of the perversion, submitting to it as righteous judgment, and finding it a price to buy wisdom, being taught by it to shed out the blood of the old nature, and yield it to God to be filled with His eternal life.

And observe, that as the fall had come by an individual, who was the First Head of the Nature, sacrificing the will of God to self-will, so this restoration and counterbalancing power came into the nature by another individual, its Second Head, in all things sacrificing self-will to the will of God ... we have in fact two natures, between which we may choose, and therefore the corruption of the old nature is no excuse for our walking in sin, because we have another nature in which we may live without sin.²⁶

The introduction of Christ into the human organism thus puts men more or less back in the position occupied by Adam before he fell. But, as Erskine says, without such an infusion of "counterbalancing power" into humanity, God would have been unjust in bringing into being any more human individuals. For all His emphasis on God's love, Erskine has thus paradoxically made the redeeming mission of Christ an act of justice owed to humanity, rather than an expression of God's unmerited grace.

The central position accorded to human free-will in Erskine's scheme is apparent. As he has denied that there is any unconditional personal election to salvation, so he insists that our own wills are the ultimate and decisive factor in our election or reprobation:

every man has, in his present state of trial, three distinct wills within him, of which he is himself conscious, - first the will of God striving with his conscience; second, the will of Satan or self ruling in his members; and third, the elective will, in his own personality, which determines with which of the other two wills he shall side. This last will, though it has this peculiar prerogative, is yet never itself the dominant will, - it only chooses which of the other two shall be dominant.²⁷

But man besides the flesh and the spirit, has a personality in him - he is a person, so that he can choose whether he will live in the one or the other, and he can consent to or resist that process of casting him into the ground that he may die, which God is continually carrying on, by what is called the course of nature and providence, for the breaking down of the flesh, and the quickening of the spirit in him. And according as he consents to or resists the plan of God in this thing, the hope of eternal life in him is either accomplished or frustrated.²⁸

Erschine's lingering Augustinianism is still evident, of course, in that this free-will is not a natural faculty but a product of the universal indwelling Christ. This is how he reinterpreted his spiritual awareness that all good in man flows from God.

When we see the two natures, of flesh and spirit, so in every man that he may join himself to either of them, and thus become either reprobate or elect, we see the root of the doctrine of election. And when we see rightly the gift of Christ, we shall see that as He is the true light which lighteth every man, so also there is in Him a communication of life to every man. For "in Him was life, and the life was the light of men;" and thus, the light which lighteth every man is a living light - a light whereby he may live. And thus by the entrance of the word into our flesh, not only has God been brought near to us, as an object of trust and love, but also His living Spirit, the divine nature, has been communicated to us subjectively as a capacity of embracing God, whether we exercise it or not.²⁹

This is similar to the Wesleyan doctrine of "sufficient grace". In Wesley's own words:

I only assert that there is a measure of free-will supernaturally restored to every man, together with that supernatural light which "enlightens every man that cometh into the world".³⁰

It is also similar to the position taken by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his Aids to Reflection:

that it is in the power of the will either to repent or to have faith in the Gospel sense of the words, is itself a consequence of the redemption of mankind, a free gift of the Redeemer: the guilt of its rejection,

the refusing to avail ourselves of the power, being all that we can consider as exclusively attributable to our own act.³¹

Yet although man's free-will is the gift of God in Christ, we must remember that God cannot justly withhold this gift, according to Erskine - a point neither Wesley nor Coleridge would have endorsed - and Erskine lays great stress on the idea that the gift is the ability to choose Christ, but that its definite exercise is a purely human, autonomous decision. Erskine imagines a Calvinist agreeing with his concept of Adam and Christ as the Reprobate and Elect Ones, but not agreeing that men can choose by mere free-will which One to follow:

But some one will say - this is true, but we must go farther back, to see what is the cause of this difference amongst men. What makes one man follow the reprobate head, and another follow the elect head? We may seek to go farther back, but God does not go farther back; He has provided man with ability, and He lays the use of that ability to man's own door. Thus in accounting for a wicked man's turning away from his wickedness, He merely says, "Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions, he shall surely live." - Ezek. 18:29. In like manner, in accounting for a wicked man continuing in his wickedness, he merely says, "Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded," etc. - Prov. i. 24.³²

To the objection that this turns faith or repentance into a meritorious ground of boasting, Erskine replies:

There is surely a very false and diseased feeling on this subject. A man whose life is saved by the kindness of another, never supposes that his own mere consent to be saved, detracts from the kindness of the other, or takes its place as the meritorious cause of his being saved. If, for instance,

he has fallen from a ship into the sea, and is pulled out by a rope thrown to him by another, he does not think of challenging much merit to himself for taking hold of the rope, and having thus submitted to be pulled out. His consent to be saved, could not have saved him, unless his deliverer³³ had been exerting himself in his behalf.

One must say that this is a remarkably poor analogy. Man-in-sin has not suffered a mere accident (falling off a ship) - which would create an obligation on the part of the rescuer to do all in his power to save the unfortunate. Moreover, Erskine himself admits that choosing Christ is a morally good thing, is indeed the quint-essential moral choice; if that choice were our own doing, unwrought by God, we would be entitled to claim for ourselves the moral credit for this most excellent of choices. If faith is not the sovereign gift of God, it does become something about which the believer can self-glorifyingly boast.

Erskine criticises Jonathan Edwards in respect of human free-will, referring to Edwards' classic work The Freedom of the Will. Edwards, Erskine says, defined freedom as "the power or advantage that anyone has to do or to conduct as he pleases";³⁴ but this "makes no distinction between the blind liberty of a beast and the rational liberty of a man".³⁵ Erskine prefers to define liberty as the ability of a subject to love and cooperate with the purpose of its ruler:

it consists in a sympathy, or agreement of choice, with regard to the dominant purpose of our acting, with the ruling and directing mind, which appoints our acting; and the capacity of liberty consists in a capacity for this sympathy.³⁶

If a ruler had to deceive his subjects about his real purpose, and manipulate them by appealing to lesser, secondary purposes, they would not be free in relation to their ruler. With a moral government flourish, which takes us back to Erskine's earliest writings, he adds that no subject could sympathise with a purpose which did not involve his own ultimate good, therefore this must be included in the ruler's purpose.

As a state of rational liberty therefore requires, on the part of the subject, a capacity of sympathising with the ruling mind, so it requires on the part of the ruler, that his ultimate purpose should embrace the good of the subjects.³⁷

This is interesting, but does it really take us beyond Erskine's earlier definition of freedom as the ability to choose between the flesh and the spirit? We are still dealing with an elective ability which is autonomous in its actual exercise, albeit now construed in terms of an ability to sympathise - and not to sympathise, presumably, if one so wills.

Erskine's verdict on Edwards is typical of his judgment on Calvinists in general at this stage of his thinking:

I believe that he was himself a good and holy man, but assuredly he has left a dark legacy to the world, in that book on the Freedom of the Will. It is a book which in its principle denies the love of God to man, so forbidding man to trust in God; and, in its mode of argument, appeals from man's conscience to his logical faculty, so putting him out of the way of knowing God, - and thus, both in principle and in argument, it is directly opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus came preaching peace, by declaring his Father to be the common Father of men, prodigals and all; - Edwards' book has not preached peace;

it has preached perplexity and doubt, by declaring that the Father of Jesus Christ is not the Father of all men, and that, though He created all men, He only loves a few of them.³⁸

The universal Fatherhood of God, it will be seen, appears explicitly in this passage as being of the essence of the gospel. The thought, if not the explicit avowal, pervades the whole volume on Election; it was to become all-absorbing in latter years.

Several other doctrinal points emerge in Election. For instance, Erskine's Irvingite Christology remains in full force:

Jesus took the flesh just as the "children" have it, Heb. ii. 14: but that does not make Him a sinner, for as He was without sin in a sinful world, so He was without sin in a sinful nature.³⁹

Erskine's doctrine of the atonement, accordingly, is as semi-exemplarist as it was in the Brazen Serpent:

He [God] had sent His own Son into the flesh, not only to prove His love to man, but also that He might have a man, a partaker of the flesh, who would go along with Him in His condemnation of the sin in it, and who would be a witness to His brethren, from His own experience, that God's will is man's only life, as it is his only guide, and that sorrow and death, when received in filial confidence, are the medicine of the soul, and the way out of the corruption; and who would not only be a witness to them of these things, but would also be in them and to them, a fountain of the same filial life, by the strength of which He Himself had done this work, enabling all who would receive it, to yield themselves unto God, and to become co-operators with Him, and co-witnesses with Him of the same truth.⁴⁰

Punishment, of course, is purificatory rather than retributive. Christ's penal substitution becomes penal example and inspiration:

Christ did not suffer to save men from punishment, but to save them from sin, by enabling them to accept their medicinal punishment, that blueness of a wound which cleanseth away evil.⁴¹

But if Christ has been in all men as enlightener and enabler since the fall of Adam, what is the relation between this and His incarnation thousands of years later?

With regard to ... the importance of the outward manifestation of Christ Himself, I make answer that I have always, throughout the course of this work, meant to teach that it was only on the ground of the outward manifestation of Christ, the Word, in our nature, fulfilling all righteousness as our Head, either anticipated in the purpose of God, or actually accomplished, that the inward word is given to man.⁴²

Christ's being in all men as their living head prior to His incarnation is a retrospective effect of His work in the flesh. The exemplarist emphasis is in the idea that what Christ enables men to do through His work is the same thing as He did, viz. to crucify the flesh, live in the spirit, and be brought through suffering and death to eternal life.⁴³

We should also observe that Election is not a Universalist tract in the eschatological sense of ἀποκαταστασις . The blessings bestowed on all men in this life do not

imply the necessary salvation of a single

individual - they merely import that all incapacity for righteousness induced by the fall, is met by the gift of a counter-capacity, placed within the reach of the whole race.⁴⁴

Full eschatological Universalism had to wait one more year before its unequivocal espousal by Erskine, as we shall see.

This brings us to Erskine's views of authority in religion as these are expressed in Election. The key term here is "conscience". We may recall a statement made by Erskine in 1820, in his Remarks:

We cannot have stronger evidence for any truth whatever than that which we have for the reality of moral obligations. Upon this basis has been reared the system of natural religion as far as it relates to the moral character of God, by simply clothing the Supreme Being with all the moral excellencies of human nature in an infinite degree. A system of religion which is opposed to these moral obligations is opposed also to right reason. This sense of moral obligation, then, which is the standard to which reason instructs man to adjust his system of natural religion, continues to be the test by which he ought to try all pretensions to Divine revelation.⁴⁵

This line of thought, softened and muted in the Remarks by Calvinistic views of sin and the authority of Scripture, has been expanded in Election into a whole vast terrain of argument, assertion and reflection. Erskine makes conscience the sovereign fact in all human experience and the final arbiter of all religious truth. By "conscience" he does not mean narrowly the awareness of right and wrong, but includes in it the consciousness of God and of spiritual reality - in fact, "the Spirit

of God in man".⁴⁶ Conscience is really the Christ in all men. Erskine frequently refers to it as natural religion:

I have more than once, through the course of this work, used the expression, natural religion, as synonymous with true religion; and expressed my belief that this naturalness was the test by which the truth of any religion proposed to man must necessarily, in the last resort, be judged. And as I knew that by speaking in this manner I ran the risk of offending those persons who have been accustomed to think of natural religion, as if it were the mere production of man's own reasoning and imagination, and have on that account been accustomed to condemn it, as the presumptuous rival and enemy of supernatural and revealed religion of which I spoke, was nothing of this kind, - that it was neither the production of man's reasoning, nor at all opposed to supernatural and revealed religion, but was itself a supernatural revelation in the heart of every human being, testifying to us what was righteousness, and declaring that the way to God was by the way of righteousness.

Let us pursue the subject a little further. I say, then, that by natural religion, I do not mean the science of theology, or that exercise of the intellect by which we trace effects to their causes, and thus arrive at a First Cause, which we call God; but a religion which has a real root in our nature, so that the doctrines of it are believed, not merely, or chiefly, on any outward authority whatever, nor on any process of reasoning whatever, but on the authority of an inward consciousness, - in the same way as we believe that there is a God, and that justice is right, and injustice wrong, not on any outward authority, but through an inward consciousness.⁴⁷

This location of the true seat of authority in inner consciousness inevitably reminds us of Schleiermacher. The difference, perhaps, lies in the fact that Erskine's notion of Christ's being in all men leads him to a more

universalised, more generally human, and less specifically or distinctively Christian account of the nature and function of this inner consciousness than we find in Schleiermacher, with his emphasis on the historical picture of Jesus as transmitted through the Church. Also it is less the sense of metaphysical dependence than the sense of ethical obligation which characterises Erskine's understanding of the inner consciousness, unlike the German thinker. Schleiermacher, we recall, was a determinist: God was for him the absolute Causality. Erskine's emphatic stress on human free-will as the locus and rationale of moral responsibility sets him apart quite sharply from Schleiermacher here. In this respect it is perhaps well to remind ourselves that William Law, not Schleiermacher, was the source of Erskine's natural-immanent view of truth and salvation. The reader of this thesis will find many of the leading ideas of Election set forth from Law if he turns back to chapter II, section (x), where Erskine's relationship to Law is examined.

Erskine's "inward consciousness", then, is distinct from logical or intellectual activity. It is a divine, supernatural revelation implanted in every heart - so that "natural" conscience or religion is really "supernatural". The universal human characteristic of moral and spiritual awareness is Christ or the Spirit abiding in all men with potentially salvific efficacy. We recognise again here that prominent motif of Erskine's religion, the blending of natural and supernatural, carried to its most extensive length, so that one can now no longer see just where the natural ends and the supernatural begins.

In a significant passage, Erskine outlines for us the relationship between conscience, Christ and the Bible:

The Bible is given to us to teach us who it is that is speaking in our hearts, that we may be persuaded to seek acquaintance with Him and to take hold of His strength, that we may be delivered from the voice and power of the evil spirit, working in our flesh, and may be lifted out of sin, and misery, and death. It is given to make us acquainted with God in our own flesh, who stands knocking at every heart. Jesus is not merely a character or personage in a book; He is a real substantial being, whom we have not to seek for at a distance, nor strive to picture to ourselves by an effort of the imagination - it is He who, however hitherto unknown or misnamed by us, is now in our own hearts, condemning evil and reproving us for yielding to it, and holding out to us a fearful looking for of judgment if we continue in it. Let us listen to Him; He hath come in the name of the Lord to bless us, by turning us away from our iniquities.⁴⁸

The Christ in all men Erskine sometimes refers to as "the inner Word", an internal analogue of the outer Word of the Bible, identifying it with the seed sown by the Son of Man in the parable of MATT. 13:1 - 30.

The first step in true religion consists in turning to this word and yielding to it, as the word of power and righteous authority. And as we have no true religion until we have made this step, or entered into this condition, so whenever we leave it, we leave true religion. And thus all farther knowledge that we get from without, either from the Bible or any other source, can only profit our souls by nourishing this seed of the word, and so enlarging the compass of its instruction and its quickening influence over us.⁴⁹

The great use which I see in the outward word, read or spoken to unbelievers, is to awaken the attention to the inward word, - and to call out an echo, as it were, from within the heart, to the truth spoken without.⁵⁰

Consequently, unless our reading of the Bible awakens us to the indwelling truth which is already present in our own hearts, our belief in the Bible's doctrines is sterile and futile.

When a man's belief of a doctrine rests merely on his belief that it is taught in the Bible, and is not confirmed by his seeing and feeling its oneness with the goodness and righteousness of God, revealed in his own conscience, it certainly is not that faith which is of the operation of the Spirit.⁵¹

Dear reader, whatever truth there may be in any doctrine, it is not true to me, that is to say, I do not profitably know its truth, until I find it witnessed to, and sealed by a sense and light of truth, in my own heart - it must be translated into a language which my heart understands - it must meet and tally with a living consciousness within me, else it is of no use to me. ⁵²

All belief of spiritual truths on the basis of external authority is thus rejected. One believes the truth rightly only when one sees it for oneself and can personally vouch for it from one's own spiritual consciousness. Taking truth on trust is not true faith - not even when the object of trust is the outward Word, the Bible.

Because of Erskine's identification of conscience with the universal indwelling Christ, he is able to argue that even the historical life, death and resurrection of Jesus have their internal analogues in the human spirit.

But if it be true, that Jesus did appear indeed as the living conscience of the whole world, then in the inward history of our own individual consciences, we must have the types corresponding to the outward

history ... And the reason that His actions in the outward world have corresponding living types within each man's conscience is, - that He Himself is truly in each man's conscience, present by His Spirit, and seeking to manifest there, in the secret of each man's personal consciousness, the same great things which He outwardly and publicly manifested in His own personal humanity in the world. Seeking, I say, to manifest the same great things, - and to this end inviting the willing co-operation of each individual soul, as the necessary condition, without which He cannot accomplish that inward work.⁵³

We may sum all this up in a single pregnant sentence of Erskine's:

the Scriptures were given, not to supersede or stand in place of the rational conscience, but to awaken and enlighten it.⁵⁴

As a corollary to this and a fitting conclusion to our analysis of Election, we should glance at how Erskine employs his principle of the sovereignty of conscience to the interpretation of the Bible. He tells us in his preface that throughout the book he has

kept the place of a commentator or expositor, confining myself entirely within the range of the written word and human consciousness ...⁵⁵

Elaborating on this last phrase he says:

When I meet with anything in the Bible to which my conscience does not consent, I feel persuaded that I don't understand its meaning; for my confidence that it comes from God, assures me, that if I understood it aright,

I should perceive its righteousness. Whilst I remain in this condition, however, I am conscious that I am not believing the thing, "for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness;" and I cannot believe anything truly unto righteousness, unless I perceive righteousness in it, - I am therefore conscious that I am not believing in it, and that I am only bowing to it. 56

Hence a proper and legitimate interpretation of a Biblical text is one that will

at once satisfy my conscience, agree with the language, and harmonise with the tenor of the discourse.⁵⁷

It is significant that "satisfy my conscience" heads the list. Here was why Erskine had at last rejected the Calvinistic doctrine of election: it did not satisfy his conscience - did not gain his moral approbation. Therefore, for that very reason, it could not possibly be in the Bible. The language and tenor of the discourse, despite Erskine's protestations to the contrary, became plastic in the heat of his own ethical preconceptions. Authority in religion was inward, personal, rational, and could not involve him in a bowing of his mind to superhuman mysteries. All must be clear, all must coincide with the natural religion in the laird of Linlathen's heart. Or, to allow Erskine himself to have the last word:

And thus it appears, - that the authority on which the gospel is to rest, is that of truth recognised and felt in the conscience, and not any outward authority however purporting to be of God, - and that those who do rest it on an outward authority, are really subverting its principles by so doing. 58

(iv) On to Universalism

The Doctrine of Election was the last book which Erskine wrote for publication during his lifetime. From 1837 to 1870 he maintained an unbroken literary silence. This means that his writing career spanned a mere seventeen years (1820 - 37) of a life which itself lasted eighty-eight years.¹ It is worth our while pausing briefly to ask ourselves why Erskine's literary career effectively came to an end in 1837.

I say "effectively", for in the closing years of his life Erskine did once more take up his pen to write a further book, prompted (it seems) by his reading of Renan's Life of Jesus, to which he reacted with distaste. Principal Shairp tells the story:

during those last years he laboured on assiduously to complete a book which he had begun, when roused by a strong sense of the spiritual blindness betrayed in Renan's much-talked-of "Vie de Jesus." That book, notwithstanding all its outward grace of style and felicitous description, seemed to him at the core so short-sighted and misleading, that after a silence of more than thirty years he once more took his pen to say something in reply to it. He utterly repudiated the character which it drew of our Lord, and almost resented the fatuity which could separate with a sharp line the morality of the Gospels from their doctrinal teaching as to Christ Himself. He used to say, "As you see in many English churches the Apostles' Creed placed on one side of the altar, on the other the Ten commandments, so Renan would divide as with a knife the moral precepts of the Gospels from their doctrines. Those he would retain, these he would throw away. Can anything be more blind? As well might you expect the stem and leaves of a flower to flourish when you had cut away the root, as to retain the morality of the Gospels when you have discarded its doctrinal basis. Faith in Christ, and God in Christ, is the only root from which true Christian morality

can grow." This, or something like this, was what he used to say, and to bring this out fully in connection with his other views of the inner and eternal relation of the Son to the Father, and of the Father to the Son, was a work which² he desired to accomplish before the end.

Erskine obviously retained to the last his sanctification-oriented conception of Christian truth : the objective existing for the sake of the subjective, the latter as the precious goal, the former as the indispensable means.

Erskine first mentions this new work in a letter to Mrs. Machar in April 1866:

I am just now engaged in writing a work which I trust God will enable me to accomplish for the benefit of some of my fellow creatures.³

He later makes reference to the ongoing composition of the volume - "this weary book, which seems never to get nearer its conclusion, in spite of continual writing", "a few last words, which I find great difficulty in doing to my own satisfaction".⁴ Erskine died before finishing the work, and it was published in its incomplete and fragmentary state in 1871 under the title The Spiritual Order. Its third chapter, on Erskine's instructions, was published separately as a tract in 1870, entitled The Purpose of God.

But the question remains : why did Erskine abandon theological writing after 1837 until this final unfinished work, composed between 1866 and 1870?

One explanation is that suggested by Duncan Finlayson in his article on Erskine's life and influence, that Erskine's disillusionment with the charismatic movement, his rejection of its genuineness and hence of the nearness of the Second Coming, may have caused a theological failure of nerve, resulting in withdrawal from public ministry.⁵

One must certainly not underestimate the traumatic nature of Erskine's abandonment of the charismatic movement. He had espoused it fervently and written in defence of it, only to end up regarding it as a delusion. No doubt this experience caused him to think twice before trying again to convert others to some novel religious view. However, this explanation of Erskine's lapse into literary silence has to cope with the fact that it was after his charismatic disillusionment in 1833 - 4 that Erskine wrote Election in 1836 - 7. If Erskine's loss of faith in things charismatic caused a failure of nerve, why did he almost immediately write another book to publicise a novel doctrine of election?

A safer explanation, I think, is that it was Erskine's very experience in writing Election that led him to relinquish his literary calling. We have seen how he himself apologised in the volume's preface for the disjointed and repetitive nature of the work. These defects began to appear in the Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel, and seriously marred the Brazen Serpent. When they dogged him again in the composition of Election, he may well have come to feel that a literary vocation was simply not his. As he said to Bishop Ewing in 1866:

I believe that it would have been well for me, and for my peace of mind and composure, had I kept to that sort of practice [letter writing] . When I get into larger things, I find myself lost in the endeavour to preserve sequence and unity. ⁶

We may add to this the twofold consideration that Erskine's religious opinions were now drastically at variance with the prevailing theology of his native land (especially when he came to hold a firm eschatological Universalism, as we shall see shortly), and that he felt himself likely to be misinterpreted as teaching a religiously lax kind of Deism. The first consideration scarcely needs illustrating. As to the second, we may ponder some words Erskine wrote to Mrs. Burnett in 1843:

The fear of doing it wrong weighs with me now much more than it used to do, so that I require a very distinct opening to induce me to enter into anything like religious conversation.⁷

What Erskine says here about conversation may well also apply to writing. He had come greatly to fear "doing it wrong" - giving a false impression. We know that this proved the case with Election, for he mentions Chalmers' reaction to it in these terms:

I had a letter from Dr. Chalmers the other day, proving to me that he had completely misunderstood my book. I need not think of writing another book to explain the book which I have already written.⁸

We do not know what Chalmers' misunderstanding was, but it was probably similar to that of Madame de Broglie, to whom Erskine had to write the following:

When I received your last letter, I was so much occupied that I entirely overlooked the criticisms which you make in it on the views which you suppose my book contains. I often feel discouraged from expressing my thoughts, by finding that I do it in so

imperfect a manner as to give entirely a false impression of them. I see that I have given you an impression perfectly foreign to my meaning. My object is not in the smallest degree to say what the conscience might do for man without the Bible, but to say that all that a man learns from the Bible, without its awakening within him a living consciousness of its truth, might as well not be learned ... I have never supposed the case of a man possessing a Bible and yet putting it from him, on the ground that conscience was sufficient.⁹

Madame de Broglie thought that Erskine was teaching the sole sufficiency of conscience as a spiritual guide and hence the irrelevance of the Bible. Erskine probably feared that he would be constantly liable to such misunderstandings, now that he had passed so far beyond the horizons of traditional Protestant theology. Hence, we may well believe, his withdrawal from public religious ministry in its literary form. From now on he would concentrate on person-to-person conversations with willing listeners.

What, then, of Erskine's final unequivocal espousal of Universalism - of ἀποκαταστάσις, the ultimate salvation of all? We can trace this clearly in his letters. His obvious concern for the doctrine appears in an epistle written from Geneva dated 3rd January 1839 (Erskine had embarked on his third continental holiday at the start of 1838):

The question of the eternity of punishments has been stirred at Lausanne, by the circumstance that a candidate for one of the theological chairs refused to subscribe to the common doctrine; notwithstanding this refusal, he was elected. Vinet only says, "La lumière me manque" ["The light fails me"] .¹⁰

Vinet is Alexandre Rodolphe Vinet (1797 - 1847), Professor of Practical Theology at Lausanne from 1837, a friend and theological sympathiser of Erskine's for whom Erskine had the highest regard.¹¹

The first lucid indication of Erskine's having accepted Universalism appears in a letter to Andrew, Lord Rutherford (1791 - 1854), a friend from his old profession of the bar, whom Erskine apparently considered not to be a Christian. He wrote to Rutherford on 24th January 1839:

I cannot tell you how well I love you, Rutherford, and how much I have prized your steady kindness and friendship. I think I could die to turn you to God, your true centre and rest. You will be forced to come to that centre some day, but it is losing much not to come immediately. I do not speak this as one superior, for I feel how much reason I have to be ashamed of what I am. You have been more faithful to your light than I have been to mine.¹²

Erskine avows that Rutherford will be "forced to come to that centre God some day": Rutherford will finally be saved. This makes no sense unless Erskine believed that all men would be saved at last.

This becomes more explicit in a letter to Davie, dated 5th February 1839. Erskine is reporting a conversation with a French lady who was sharing her perplexities with him over the relation between God's love for man and men dying in a Godless state:

I then told her frankly what I hoped for all men. She told me that she herself sometimes entertained that hope, but that she could not find it in the Bible, yet she thought there could be no real gospel without it. I think so too - the unending love of God ...¹³

Although Erskine speaks of his "hope" for all men, which may imply uncertainty, he also clearly affirms that "there can be no real gospel without it". Any doctrine without which there cannot be a true gospel must itself be true.

Our final piece of evidence comes in a letter to Captain Paterson dated 21st March 1839, concerning the death of an unbelieving friend at the age of 26:

My belief in the continuation of the process of spiritual education beyond this life relieves me at all events from the agonizing thought that twenty-six years of negligence are to fix the eternal condition of the soul for good or evil. I cannot read the passage contained in the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, verses 30 - 33, without wondering that any should think that the Bible decidedly teaches that doctrine ...¹⁴

The relevant verses in ROMANS read:

For just as you [Gentiles] once were disobedient to God but now have been shown mercy because of their [the Jews'] disobedience, so these also now have been disobedient in order that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all. Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

It is impossible to see how this text could serve as a basis for believing in salvation beyond death for those who die unbelieving, except on the supposition that Erskine interpreted verse 32, "that He might show mercy to all", as meaning that God will save all.

These three utterances, falling between 24th January and

21st March 1839, indicate that period as the time during which Erskine unequivocally accepted Universalism. In the following years he was often to declare his belief in this doctrine in the strongest terms. A typical declaration occurs in a letter to John Craig, member of the Catholic Apostolic Church and author of a Universalist tract entitled The Final Salvation of All Men From Sin:

I feel ... that the passages which I have quoted from the Epistle to the Romans (ch.5 and 11) ought really to be considered as the ruling passages on the question, and that those from St. Matthew, and others of the same class [MATT. 25:31 - 46 and other texts on eternal punishment] , should be explained by them, and in accordance with them, because in them the fall and the restoration are expressly compared with each other, in their whole results, and the entire superiority claimed for the restoration in amount of benefit, and entire equality in point of extent; all which would seem to me to be utterly nullified by the fact of a single human spirit being abandoned and consigned to a permanent state of sin and misery ... I believe that love and righteousness and justice in God mean exactly the same thing, namely, a desire to bring His whole moral creation into a participation of His own character and His own blessedness. He has made us capable of this, and He will not cease from using the best means for accomplishing it in us all. When I think of God making a creature of such capacities, it seems to me almost blasphemous to suppose that He will throw it from Him into everlasting darkness, because it has resisted His gracious purposes towards it for the natural period of human life. No; He Who waited so long for the formation of a piece of old red sandstone will surely wait with much long-suffering for the perfecting of a human spirit.¹⁵

In a letter to John Young in February 1870, only a month before Erskine's death, Erskine describes the process by which he became a Universalist.¹⁶ He says that "the first text that led me to the desired conclusion" was

PS. 25:8: "Good and upright is the LORD, therefore He instructs sinners in the way." Erskine concluded from this that God's goodness and righteousness were educative, not retributive, towards sinners; His justice prompted Him, not to reject them, but savingly to instruct them. Then PS. 107 contributed to this thought, with its picture of the chastening activity of God, sending calamities on men to draw them back to Himself. Chapters 5 and II of ROMANS then came into play, with their emphasis on the superabounding of grace over sin; JER. 29 - 33, with its depiction of God's unfailing love for Israel, even amid His punishments; and LEV. 26, with its graphic description of God's chastening on sinful Israel, designed to lead them to repentance. In this way Erskine says he arrived at his belief in the beneficial nature of all God's punitive providence, since the all-controlling desire in God was to make sinners righteous. In a nutshell:

My hope for the final salvation of all men rests, in the first place, on ... the desire of God that all men should be righteous; in the second place, on the assurance that God sees the end from the beginning, and will never bring into existence any spirits which He foresees will finally resist His desire.¹⁷

With this, our account of Erskine's theological pilgrimage is complete. It only remains for us now to gather up the threads and to offer a few reflections of our own, by way of a tentative conclusion.

Early on in this thesis, we singled out Erskine's tendency to blend the natural and the supernatural as one of the fundamental motifs in his religion. We have seen at various points how this operated. By the time he wrote Election, it had become very pronounced indeed. As we take leave of Erskine, we may note its powerful presence

in many of the details of his evolved theology: Christ is in all men, all are in effect regenerate, Christ has a fallen humanity like all men and His work is to be reproduced by all, God is equally Father of all, the divine purpose is indiscriminately redemptive, and all will be saved. The distinction between redeemed sinners and sinless Redeemer has been greatly blurred by conceiving Christ's manhood as both collective and fallen, His work as largely a pioneering to be followed, and His relation to all men as that of an indwelling presence which men name "conscience". The distinction between regenerate and unregenerate, elect and non-elect, children of God and children of Satan, saved and unsaved, has been virtually obliterated. Instead of the Evangelical scheme of salvation in which Erskine once believed, we have a scheme of cosmic egalitarian education, whose goal is to enlighten all men as to what has always been true about God and themselves - His eternal and universal love and grace as Father, their eternal destiny as His children. In the perceptive words of H.F. Henderson:

Erskine ... confounded the natural with the supernatural. He considered that the great end and aim of a supernatural revelation was to republish truths that were as old as creation, truths that the world had lost sight of, to reintimate to mankind those gracious relationships that exist between the Creator and all His creatures, and that have always existed, and to write large on the statute-books of ethics those principles of the fatherly Government of God that have always held, and always shall hold sway ... Perhaps Erskine, in his tendency to one-sidedness, pushed the analogy between the supernatural and the natural further than he ought to have done. Sometimes he reminds us of one of the old apologists, Justin or Aristides, e.g. who, in their laudable endeavour to commend their religion to the heathen world, represented it as in accordance with reason and sound philosophy, as philosophy brought within the reach of women and uneducated men; and did not emphasise

its redemptive character. Probably Erskine was rash in thus identifying Scripture in all its parts with the natural government of the world and the teachings of man's natural intuitions. But certainly he never denied the reality of the supernatural, like the deists, though he may have gone too far in identifying it with the merely natural. It would be truer to say that he exalted the merely natural into supernatural rank.¹⁸

Justin Martyr and Aristides should perhaps give place to Clement of Alexandria, Erskine's resemblance to whom has forcibly struck the present writer. In both men we see the same insistence on the universal illuminating ministry of Christ the Logos, the same admiration of the classical pagan poets and sages, particularly Plato (the "Attic Moses", Clement says), the same absorption of God's justice into His fatherly love, the same optimism about the spiritual destiny of humanity, the same personal warmth, aesthetic culture and literary diffuseness. Erskine never mentions Clement, or his greater pupil Origen (William Law, we reiterate, is the only verifiable source of Erskine's "Clementine" ideas), nor was Erskine's patristic learning great, but we can surely detect an authentic kinship of spirit between the laird of Linlathen and the Christian Platonists of Alexandria.

We have also from the outset drawn attention to Erskine's tendency to melt away divine justice into a mere glimmering on the surface of the ocean of divine love. In his early Calvinistic days this took the form of a moral government conception of the atonement, wherein punitive justice was apprehended as a function of God's benevolence in maintaining the harmony of the universe; in his latter Universalist days, justice became transmuted into almost medical categories - into spiritual treatment aimed at curing the soul of its sinful deformities. We search

in vain for a genuine doctrine of retribution, of a holy God's necessary expression of His infinite hatred of sin by way of the lex talionis, the infliction of proportionate suffering in the name of ill-desert. Erskine could have learnt from Coleridge here:

That all punishments work for the good of the whole, and that the good of the whole is included in God's design, I admit: but that this is the sole cause, and the sole justification of divine punishment, I cannot, I dare not concede; because I should thus deny the essential evil of guilt, and its inherent incompatibility with the presence of a Being of infinite holiness.¹⁹

I believe, that punishment is essentially vindictive, i.e. expressive of abhorrence²⁰ of Sin for its own exceeding sinfulness.

For Erskine, however, God's love for the sinner, not God's hatred of sin, was the true cause of punishment: reformatory benevolence, not "vindictiveness", i.e. retribution. Once God's love has been elevated into this position of autocracy over His other attributes, Universalism seems logically inevitable. As Erskine himself pointed out, would a God in Whom love for His creatures was the dominant attribute bring into being creatures whom He foreknew would finally reject Him?

This exclusive concentration on divine love illustrates indeed a general tendency to selectiveness or one-sidedness in Erskine's thought, remarked on by his own friends and contemporaries. McLeod Campbell felt distressed by Erskine's

tendency to reduce many aspects of truth to one, making him hesitate to see now the importance, not to say the correctness, of what he once urged; making him, indeed, appear to give up what he once held. I

do not believe that his views have at all changed as they appear to himself to have done; and I have urged him to have his old books read to him, in the expectation that he may receive from his former self, so to speak, strictures upon what he now dwells exclusively on, that he cannot easily receive from another.²¹

Principal Shairp contrasted the minds of Erskine and Campbell in this respect:

Mr. Erskine, whatever truth possessed him, threw himself wholly into it, became absorbed in it, expounded it with a gentle yet vehement eloquence, and illustrated it with a wealth of ingenious illustration which was quite foreign to Mr. Campbell's habits of thought. Mr. Campbell, on the other hand, even the truths he most realised, he could contemplate with long patience, could move round them, and consider them deliberately from every side, could see them in all their bearings on other truths, and see those other truths in their bearing on them. This patient power of balancing truths seemingly opposed, combined with the persistent adherence to his first cherished principles, contrasted strikingly with the vehemence with which Mr. Erskine flung himself on the thoughts that had once taken possession of him.

Arising perhaps out of this tendency in Mr. Erskine to be absorbed in one great truth, which he made to overbear all other truths that opposed it, was his belief in the final restitution of all men.²²

Erskine, in other words, did not have the bent of mind which makes a systematic theologian. Hence his confessed difficulties in writing books - "I find myself lost in the endeavour to preserve sequence and unity."²³

Erskine's unity did not lie in formal thought, in mental apprehension of Biblical doctrines, but in his own inner

temper, spirit and life. His Doctrine of Election, with its theology of consciousness, is perhaps best understood as Erskine's profoundest attempt to rationalise his own inward-looking, individualistic, moralising psychology. The Scottish Schleiermacher had finally subordinated the constraints of objective propositional dogma to the more congenial reign of a theology of subjective spiritual experience. As the Pious Man was the centre of Schleiermacher's theology, so the Good Man was the centre of the more classically inclined Erskine's theology. The chief task of God Himself, after all, was to make men good. Erskine's conscience became the supreme criterion of truth, so that what he called his ethical pragmatism seems the natural outcome of his chosen starting point.

If I find that certain ideas inflict desolation and paralysis on my spirit, whilst others give me, what I am sure is a righteous hope and a righteous strength, am I not justified in believing that the latter are nearest the truth?²⁴

The rule of the personal, the inward, the experimental, was thus inaugurated, with all its effects on the fabric of the dogmatic theology assimilated by Erskine from his Evangelical environment. What was his conscience but Christ within him? What were his own sinful inclinations but those of that organic nature of which Christ was the living Head? What were his experiences of pain and grief but a salvific participation in the suffering of that Head? What was the Bible itself but an external analogue of the inward word of his own Christ-indwelt spirit? And supremely, what were his own overflowing affections and moral aspirations, if not a divine guarantee that no man would finally be given up to sin and sorrow by the God in Whose likeness Erskine was made?

Or was it the God Whom Erskine had made in his own likeness? The question haunts and disturbs the student of the laird of Linlathen. He himself disclaimed such a notion:

It seems to me we are more and more coming to this issue - Has God revealed Himself to us as one Whose "ways are not as our ways, nor His thoughts as our thoughts"? or, Do we evolve out of our own inward light the existence of One who personifies our own highest conceptions of moral good?

For my own part, I am deeply grateful to the Calvinian atmosphere one has insensibly breathed from childhood for predisposing the mind in favour of the first, although by its unscriptural excesses unhappily contributing to the spreading reaction in favour of the latter ... 25

Erskine's critics were not so sure. Against Erskine's disclaimer we must set the probing question of Robertson of Greenock, addressed to Erskine at the height of the Row controversy in 1830:

The God Whom you have chosen is agreeable to your feelings, but has it never occurred to you that you may not have chosen the God of the Bible? 26

This thesis is an essay at presenting the evidence on the basis of which the reader may decide where, as regards these two quotations, the balance of truth lies.

APPENDIX I. RALPH WARDLAW'S COMPARATIVE EVALUATION OF CHALMERS' "EVIDENCE AND AUTHORITY OF THE CHRISTIAN REVELATION", AND ERSKINE'S "REMARKS ON THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE FOR THE TRUTH OF REVEALED RELIGION".

Ralph Wardlaw, nineteenth century Scotland's most esteemed Congregationalist divine, has a section in his Systematic Theology dealing with apologetics, in which he enters into the external-internal evidence debate. He does this largely by setting alongside each other Chalmers' Evidence and Authority of the Christian Revelation, and Erskine's Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion, as representatives respectively of the external and internal approach - which we may take as another hint that Erskine's volume was, or was seen as, a specific response to the earlier work of Chalmers.¹ Since Wardlaw's writings are now generally unavailable, I reproduce here the passage from volume one of his Systematic Theology in which he undertakes this comparative evaluation, as a particularly lucid example of Evangelical theological reaction to the Chalmers-Erskine exchange. It will be seen that Wardlaw basically sides with Erskine, albeit with some reservations. It is significant that his main criticism of Erskine is that he over-emphasises the value of general revelation: a feature of Erskine's thought which became increasingly pronounced in the course of Erskine's theological development.

Extract from Wardlaw's "Systematic Theology", vol. I, pp. 486-497.

But there is another ground of objection to this department of internal evidence. It is taken by one who is no enemy, but a warm and decided friend, a modern and living author highly and justly eminent [Chalmers]. In his work on the evidences of Christianity (as it formerly stood), he considers in detail those kinds of internal proof which we have already been endeavouring to bring before you, and assigns to them their full measure of force; yet not, we think, more than they will actually bear. But he sets entirely aside the internal evidence from the matter of the Gospel testimony. He does this on the ground, that, the force of the argument lying in the adaptation of the Gospel scheme of salvation to the character of Deity, it supposes that character previously ascertained, and ascertained with such clearness and certainty, as to warrant our assuming it as a fixed standard, and framing our reasonings accordingly. He does not conceive that nature puts us in possession of such a previous standard; and thus, questioning the data which he accounts necessary to the forming of the argument, he questions the legitimacy and conclusiveness of the argument itself. Having spoken in strong terms of the satisfactory conclusiveness of the marks of veracity in the New Testament writings and other similar kinds of internal evidence, he adds:

"We cannot say so much, however, for the other species of internal evidence, that which is founded upon the reasonableness of the doctrines, or the agreement which is conceived to subsist between the nature of the Christian religion and the character of the Supreme Being. We have experience of man; but we have no experience of God. We can reason upon the procedure of man in given circumstances, because this is an accessible subject, and comes under the cognizance of observation; but we cannot reason on the procedure of the Almighty in given circumstances. This is an inaccessible subject, and comes not within the limit of direct and personal observation." Again: "There is no subject to which the cautious and humble spirit of Lord Bacon's philosophy is more applicable; nor can we conceive a more glaring rebellion against the authority of his maxims, than for the beings of a day to sit in judgment on the Eternal, and apply their paltry experience to the counsels of His high and unfathomable wisdom." "The question before us is: - How far the experience of man can lead him to any certain conclusions as to the character of the Divine administration? If it does lead him to some certain conclusions, the, in the spirit of the Baconian philosophy, he will apply these conclusions to the information derived from other sources; and they will of course affect, or destroy, or confirm, the credibility of that information. If, on the other hand, it appears that experience gives no light, no direction on the subject, then, in the very same spirit,

he will submit his mind as a blank surface to all the positive information which comes to it from any other quarter." And, in summing up his reasoning, he says - "We hold by the total insufficiency of natural religion to pronounce upon the intrinsic merits of any revelation, and think that the authority of every revelation rests exclusively upon its external evidences, and upon such marks of honesty in the composition itself as would apply to any human performance."

In thus discarding all that usually goes under the designation of internal evidence, this eminent writer is directly at issue with another writer, also deservedly high in public reputation [Erskine]. He rests most of all upon the internal evidence, or the conformity of the peculiar discoveries of revelation to the human mind's previous anticipations of Deity, derived from pre-existing sources of information. When we are once convinced of the existence of a cause, and are acquainted with its ordinary mode of operation, we are prepared to give a certain degree of credit to a history of other effects ascribed to it, provided we can trace the connection between them. And having given a beautiful analogical illustration of this general principle, he proceeds to apply it: - "Surely, then, in a system which purports to be a revelation from heaven, and to contain a history of God's dealings with men, and to develop truths with regard to the moral government of the universe, the knowledge and belief of which will lead to happiness here and hereafter, we may expect to find (if its pretensions are well-founded) an evidence for its truth which shall be independent of all external testimony. But we cannot have any internal evidence on a subject which is, in all its parts and bearings and relations, entirely new to us; because, in truth, the internal evidence depends entirely on our knowledge, that certain causes are followed by certain effects."

"If the subject-matter of divine revelation be entirely new to us, we cannot possibly have any ground on which we may rest our judgment as to its probability. But is this the case with that system of religion which is called Christianity? Is the object which it has in view an entirely new object? Is the moral mechanism which it employs for the accomplishment of that object, different in kind from the moral mechanism which we ourselves set to work every day upon our fellow-creatures, whose conduct we wish to influence in some particular direction, or from that by which we feel ourselves to be led in the ordinary course of providence? Is the character of the Great Being, to whose inspiration this system is ascribed, and whose actions are recorded by it, entirely unknown to us, except through the medium of this revelation? Far from it. The indications of the divine character in nature, in providence, and in conscience, were surely given to direct and instruct us in our relations to God and to His creatures. The indications of His kindness have a tendency to attract our gratitude; and the indications of His displeasure to check and alarm us. We infer that His own character truly embodies all those qualities which He approves; and is perfectly free from all which He condemns. The man who adopts this scheme of natural religion, which, though deficient in point of practical influence over the human mind, is yet true, and who has learned from experience to refer actions to their moral causes, is in possession of all the elementary principles which qualify him to judge of the internal evidence of Christianity."

It may seem to some, that modes of reasoning so different must mutually neutralize and destroy each other. But that would be a hasty and unwarranted conclusion. The greatest and best of men are liable to err in judgment. And even when there are perhaps two extremes on the same subject, and two men of eminence diverge from each other, one to each of the extremes, it would be a very hard case to infer immediately that the point itself must be given up, respecting which the truth may be found to be between. You must first of all observe, that these opposite grounds of reasoning have no reference whatever to the external evidence, in any of its various branches. That remains untouched. And we may conceive both writers to have a due appreciation of its value and conclusiveness. The difference regards solely that which is internal; and the evidence, notwithstanding the difference, may be found to stand in its full force. In discarding it altogether, I cannot but think the former of these two writers has gone quite too far. The ground on which he does discard it, does not appear to be at all sufficient. For -

1. Whatever men may actually have learned from nature, apart from revelation, of the character of the true God (and in this view it is cheerfully granted, natural religion

is not only a very meagre system, but, while it presents an almost endless variety, a system of equal folly and vileness, no one of its varieties possessing a sufficiency of redeeming excellence to put another to shame), yet still, it is difficult to affix its exact amount of meaning to the expression - "We have experience of man, but we have no experience of God." Our experience of God may not, in some respects, be precisely the same in kind or in the manner in which it is acquired, with our experience of men, but experience of God we surely have. What are the works of nature, the ways of providence, or the inward motions of conscience, but different fields or compartments of the same field in which we may gather experience of God? If we judge of men by their doings, are we not to judge of God by His? Is the affirmation, that we have "no experience of God," quite in harmony with the apostolic representation of the case? Could men be "without excuse" in not knowing God if they had no experience of Him? by which I can only understand their having no such data as may enable them to form a judgment of His character, so as in any degree to appreciate the consistency with that character of any scheme or course of procedure that might be attributed to them?

2. While it is freely granted, that "there cannot be a grosser violation of the maxims of sound philosophy, than for the creatures of a day to sit in judgment on the Eternal, and apply their paltry experience to the counsels of His high and unfathomable wisdom;" and also that, in a very important sense, "natural religion is insufficient to pronounce upon the intrinsic merits of any revelation;" yet it is surely true that there must be a harmony between the lessons of nature and the lessons of revelation. If they come from the same God they cannot be at variance. If they regard the procedure of the same God, the procedure ascribed to Him in the one must be in accordance with the principles of character manifested to belong to Him by the other. The two volumes of discovery must, in this respect, correspond with each other. We are far from meaning that revelation is no more than a republication and certification to mankind of the lessons of nature. Than that hypothesis few things can be more unreasonable. But even in those parts of the divine administration, which are peculiar to revelation, and which it is its special province and design to unfold, there must be nothing contrary to the lessons of the divine character communicated in the volume of nature. If in any professed revelation there should be demonstrated an evident contrariety between any of its statements and the obvious indications of the divine attributes contained in the works of God, would not such demonstration be at the same time a demonstration that its claims were not valid? I grant that if there be a satisfactory proof of its truth of an external kind, if miracles have been wrought, or prophecies fulfilled, and all the outward symptoms of verity concur to establish the validity of its claims, this would constitute a sufficient ground for our belief, previously to, and independently of our acquaintance with the nature of the communication. If a miracle is actually wrought, if this be with certainty ascertained; the doctrine in support of which it is performed must be true. We cannot admit the propriety of judging the truth of the doctrine by the miracle; and then reciprocally judging the reality of the miracle by the nature of the doctrine. But then, let it be observed, as the God by whom the miracle is wrought is the God from whom the doctrine comes; and the God who works the miracle and gives the doctrine is also the God by whom the universe was created, who upholds and governs all things, whose works we see around us, and whose providential administration is daily passing in review before us; we may be sure that there is, and can be no contrariety in the different departments. A revelation which comes from the God of nature must be in harmony with the character of the God of nature; and the suspension of nature's laws by nature's God would never take place, unless to verify a message, or effect a purpose of His own; He cannot contradict Himself. Is not the demonstration, then, of this harmony betwixt the character of the God of nature and the God of revelation - betwixt His attributes, as they appear in the government of creation by fixed laws, and as they appear in the moral ends for which those laws are suspended, the very perfection of our argument for the truth of Christianity? I think it is; and I cannot but regard the internal evidence as, on this account, forming a most important and essential link in the chain. The discoveries of revelation not only may, but must be peculiar; something beyond and above those of nature, and intended to effect some purpose for which those

of nature were not competent. But still they must be discoveries of the same God. They must not appear as if they came from a different being. They must not be dissimilar, if I may so express myself, in their great principles, or in the attributes of character which they display. God is one.

3. The question: - Whether there exist in nature sufficiently manifest indications of the being and perfections of God, and the question: - Whether these indications have been duly observed by mankind; and the lessons of truth and duty which they furnish actually deduced from them, are perfectly distinct: and are very far from admitting of the same answer. The answers must be perfectly the reverse of each other. Nature does teach; but men have not learned. The fault is not in the lessons, but in the learners. "The world by wisdom knew not God." Still, however, it is a truth, that, although men be thus criminally inconsiderate and ignorant; the truth may commend itself to the approval of sound and enlightened reason when made known, which men either did not discover, or were even incompetent to discover. I need not dwell on this proposition in the way of illustration or proof. It will hardly be disputed. The same thing occurs in matters of ordinary life every day. Things of which we never thought ourselves, the instant they are stated, recommend themselves by their propriety and soundness of principle, and delight us by their appropriateness to the proposed end, so that we wonder we did not think of them. So may it be with discoveries of Himself or of His purposes made to us by the blessed God.

On this account I cannot but be of opinion, further, that while the former of the two writers on whose views I have been commenting is wrong in sweeping away or denying the existence of the basis of internal evidence, the latter confines and narrows the basis too much. The former assumes that we have no data from nature on which to build the argument; the latter makes the data we have from nature the sole basis of the argument: and represents the argument consequently as lying, not in what the Scriptures reveal of God, but solely in the harmony of the great principles of the Gospel scheme with what nature reveals of Him. This seems to me too narrow ground. I think it may with truth and with advantage be widened. In the view which the ingenious and able author takes of it, he is led to make quite as much of natural religion, when considered as meaning, not merely what nature teaches of God, but what men actually learn, as is consistent with the state of existing facts. I might perhaps at once go further, and say, that his natural religion is something much better and more inviting than anything which, without revelation, is actually to be found amongst mankind. I would therefore extend the basis of the argument, and consider it in a threefold point of view.

1. The views of God given in the New Testament contrasted with the universal results of unassisted reason.

2. The grand peculiarity of revelation, the scheme of the Gospel, and the perfection of its accordance with all the attributes of that character which both nature and revelation give of the Godhead.

3. The divine adaptation of the Gospel to the exigencies of the human character and condition, not only as these exigencies are stated in revelation, but as they appear in existing facts; and the beautiful agreement between the administration of God towards man in His providence and in the interposition of His grace for his salvation.

1. The argument arising from the first of these is very simple; and it appears to me perfectly legitimate. It is susceptible of great amplitude of illustration; but the substance of it may be stated in very few words. In constructing it, we take, not of course what nature actually contains of the manifestation of God, but what we know from experience men have actually learned. We take the religious history of the world for 4000 years. We find the original knowledge of God very soon lost, and the universal aspect of mankind presenting a most complete and invariable verification of the Apostle's description (ROM. 1:20-25). We take even the writings of the sages, the wise men in Egypt, and Greece, and Rome, and in the most brilliant periods of the philosophical and literary history of such countries; we find in their speculations on such subjects an occasional ray of truth, mixed with a great mass of darkness, and error, and conjecture, and doubt. We look abroad on the heathen world now; and we see the very same state of things still, in every place where Christianity has not penetrated; all "without God" (EPH. 2:2), and "given to idolatry" (ACTS 17:16). We then take up this little book. We find there some-

thing altogether different, and so transcendantly superior as to admit of no comparison. We find it declaring: - "God is one;" (GAL.3:20) "God is a Spirit;" (JN.4:24) "God is light;" (I JN.1:5) "God is love." (I JN.4:8) We find this one great Spirit represented as self-existent and eternal; infinite in His being and in all His perfections; omnipresent, omniscient, immutable, wise, holy, just, true, good, and merciful; and, in His whole administration toward His creatures, maintaining an unswerving adherence to the claims of every attribute of this all-perfect character. We find every view of God that is fitted at once to inspire fear and love; to command adoring veneration, and to conciliate and fix affectionate and confiding attachment.

Whence, then, comes this? Is not the conclusion fair, immediate and powerful? The experiment was made on an extensive scale; in every variety of circumstance; in many instances to the very best possible advantage. It was continued for centuries and millenniums, and the result was uniform, without one solitary exception, but where God had interposed to give what man had never found. What, then, are we to think? What could enable the writers of this little volume to acquire conceptions of the Divine Being so incomparably superior to everything that human wisdom, in its best estate, had previously produced? Are we not constrained to say there must be something more than human wisdom here? The argument and conclusion we might consider, as even independent of the question: - By whom was the Book written? But when we take into account the actual authors of the Book, ascertained by evidences more numerous and satisfactory than those which establish the authorship of any ancient writing whatever, it receives great additional strength.

To my mind the ground of argument, from a comparison of the results of the unassisted wisdom of men for thousands of years, with the views of Deity in His nature, and attributes, and government, which are given in the New Testament, does appear very strong. Human wisdom, even when exercised in the most favourable circumstances, and possessed in the highest degree (in a degree which has astonished mankind by its successful application to other subjects) has never produced anything at all like this: anything approaching to it in loftiness, in loveliness, in purity, in consistency, in general excellence, in holy and happy tendency. There is nothing, in regard to God and sacred things, in pages even of those sages who stood highest in Greek or in Roman fame, that can at all pretend to rival it. Are we not in such circumstances warranted, nay, more than warranted; are we not compelled to conclude that there are in this Book the discoveries of a wisdom and a knowledge more than human? - that it is not the writers that tell us the thoughts of God, which have occurred to their own minds, but God that, through them, tells us of Himself? - that He dictates what they record? Give me a sensible boy, a boy in any degree accustomed and trained to reflection. I would request him to read from such a book as Tooke's Pantheon, the genealogy and actions of the "gods many, and lords many," in the "elegant mythology of Greece and Rome;" no, I would rather omit them. Having given him a view of the contemptible fooleries, and, as far as safe, of the sickening abominations of the popular system, I would put into his hands such a work as Cicero on the Nature of the Gods, that he might see the lengths to which philosophy, even with the aids of traditionary remnants of truth, and the glimpses of light that came indirectly from Judea, could go, in regard to God and to divine things. And, having shown him the dubious twilight at the best, in which these all-important subjects are left involved; the twilight of conjecture; the mingled light and shade of truth and error, with a melancholy preponderance of the latter, on points where clearness of vision and certainty of knowledge are so supremely desirable: I would then call my young pupil to a serious perusal of the New Testament; let it be no more, if you will, than a simply intellectual perusal, only set about in earnest to ascertain its lessons on this one subject, with the single view, that is, of observing the manner in which the writers speak of God. I would beg him to mark the nature and moral attributes with which He there appears invested; His unity, His spirituality, His eternity, His omnipresence and omniscience, His almighty power, His unerring wisdom, His holiness, His justice, His truth, His love, His delight in mercy, His absolute and infinite perfection in every natural and moral attribute; and His necessary immutability in them all. I would direct him to contemplate these both as they are abstractly stated, and as they are practically mani-

fested and exemplified in the works which are ascribed to their divine possessor. I would call upon him thus to read, to consider, to compare: and, whatever might be the influence upon his heart, - whether its devout affections were awakened and won to God or not, I think I would, with the utmost confidence, calculate on carrying his judgment - his understanding, and impressing upon it a strong conviction, that this wonderful little Book, which, on these subjects rises so transcendently above all that human wisdom had previously done, must have been the product of a mind superior to those of the fishermen of Galilee or the tent-maker of Tarsus, or of all that had heretofore tried their intellect on those mighty themes; - that GOD HIMSELF IS HERE!

The mode of reasoning which I have thus briefly detailed, appears to be perfectly legitimate. And I need not say it is strictly and properly internal evidence, - evidence deduced from the matter or contents of the book, compared with the lessons on the same subjects derived by the wisdom of men from other sources.

APPENDIX II. DAVID RUSSELL'S "LETTERS" AND ERSKINE'S
"ESSAY ON FAITH" : AN EXAMPLE OF DIRECT INFLUENCE.

It is interesting to speculate on the extent to which David Russell's Letters, Chiefly Practical and Consolatory influenced Erskine's Essay on Faith. He was reading Russell with warm appreciation at the time that he wrote the Essay, and the present writer has been struck again and again by the similarities of sentiment and even phraseology between the two works. Erskine, for instance, warns against the perils of a self-examination which diverts attention from the gospel, by the following illustration:

If I am intent on examining and investigating that pleasing emotion, which is produced in the mind by the contemplation of the beauties of nature, it is impossible that I can feel much of that pleasure... The delightful feeling is produced by contemplating the external object; not by observing nor by knowing how we enjoy it.¹

But in the same connection Russell had already observed in his Letters:

If, when looking on any painting, or on any interesting piece of scenery, we begin to reason on the laws of optics, and get into a discussion relative to the way in which the power of vision is produced, we instantly forget the object before us.²

Along the same lines, Erskine directs us away from our feelings, to the gospel itself as the cause of all spiritual feelings:

The first Scriptural consolation received by the believer, arises from his conviction that the Gospel itself is true, and the measure of his comfort corresponds with the strength and steadiness of his faith.³

This is almost word-for-word what Russell had previously written:

the first Scriptural consolation received by the believer arises from the Gospel, and not from reflecting on the feelings or change of his own mind towards it...⁴

Concerning the nature of belief in the gospel, Erskine says:

we do not understand nor believe a moral action, whilst we do not enter into its spirit and meaning... In order then to a full belief of the Gospel, there must be an impression or conception on our mind, representing every moral quality, and every truth contained and embodied in the facts of the Gospel history; for the Gospel consists not in the facts, but in the meaning of the facts.⁵

Russell had anticipated this almost precisely:

The faith of the Gospel is not merely the belief of certain facts, but also and chiefly, of the import of these facts... The Gospel consists not simply in the facts, but in their moral meaning. The unbelieving Jews saw many of the actions or facts, in which the Gospel was embodied, but they did not understand the spirit and meaning of what they saw.⁶

Erskine argues that faith and repentance are inseparable aspects of the same mental process, in which a knowledge of the crucified Christ brings about a change of mind and heart:

Repentance means a change of mind, and therefore it necessarily accompanies a new belief. When we take new views, we must make a change, we must leave our old ones... But the real sorrow of the heart, on account of sin, can arise only from the sense of the amazing contrast between the subduing and overwhelming mercy of God and our unworthiness. It is when we look on Him Whom we have pierced, that we mourn truly...⁷

The same point had been made by Russell in similar terms:

If then, it [repentance] be a change of mind to the acknowledging of the truth, it of course must include faith in it... It is only by looking on Calvary, and on the beauty of holiness as exemplified by Him Whom our sins pierced, that our sense of guilt and of demerit is deepened, and that we are made to mourn for sin with genuine and heart-

felt contrition.⁸

Erskine presents the understanding which he had in 1822 of the doctrine of election in these words:

The doctrine of election is just another name for the doctrine of free grace. It teaches that all men are under deserved condemnation, and therefore can have no claim on God for pardon; and that this, and other mercies, are the gifts of His own free bounty and choice. It thus teaches us humility and gratitude, by impressing us with the conviction that we are debtors to God's unmerited bounty, not only for the gift of Christ and the knowledge of it, but also for the influence of the Spirit which inclines our hearts to accept it.⁹

It is a reproduction with insignificant verbal alterations of Russell's treatment of the same subject:

The Scripture doctrine of election, then, is in one view but another name for the doctrine of free grace. It teaches that all are righteously condemned, that none can have the smallest claim upon God, and that the Divine gifts are the fruit of unmerited favour and of God's own free choice. It is introduced, therefore, for the purpose of teaching Christians to cherish humility and gratitude, by impressing them with the conviction, that to the Divine mercy and free bounty they are indebted, not only for the gift of the Redeemer, but also for that gracious influence of the Holy Spirit which inclined their depraved hearts to embrace the Gospel.¹⁰

Erskine's evident dependence on Russell shows that his theological productivity did not take place in a vacuum. He was profoundly open to the influence of others. Erskine's power of innovation did not consist in a perverse independence of other men's thoughts, but in his capacity to assimilate them and make something different of them. Samuel Taylor Coleridge again springs to mind as a pertinent theological comparison.

It is interesting that Erskine's name was bracketed with Russell's by Josiah Conder, editor of the liberally Evangelical periodical, the Eclectic Review, in the May 1825 issue:

With the highest satisfaction, we observe that a purer and more Scriptural theology is gaining ground among our brethren in the North; and we hail the appearance of such writers as Mr. Russell and his friend Mr. Erskine, as a circumstance of the happiest augury.¹¹

The connection Conder thus makes testifies not only to the common theology shared by Russell and Erskine but also to the fact of their friendship at this time.

APPENDIX III. ERSKINE'S UTTERANCES ABOUT HELL BETWEEN
1828 AND 1837.

There are but two ways in which a man can walk towards eternity - the narrow way which leads to life and the broad way which leads to destruction.¹

(Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel, 1828).

...no heart which does not sympathise with the threatened destruction of evil, can possibly embrace cordially, or enjoy fully, the forgiveness of the gospel...and if it continues in this state through all eternity, it must through all eternity be a child of wrath and outer darkness.²

(Ibid.).

Oh! then is there any madness equal to the madness of neglecting the soul, and the favour of God, and spending thy short uncertain hour here in treasuring up for thyself regrets and fears against the hour of death, and misery for the life to come?³

(Ibid.).

...no conceivable pardon could ever undo the necessary connexion between misery in the creature and opposition to the will of the Creator. And, besides this, there is also the condemnation at last for the rejection of the gospel, and the penalty of the second death.⁴

(Introductory Essay to Extracts of Letters to a Christian Friend, 1830).

But it may be asked, what sort of pardon is that, which admits of a man's being finally condemned? Is it consistent with justice that a man should be condemned for an offence which had already been pardoned? No surely! What is the meaning then of a man being pardoned and yet condemned after all? The explanation is just this: he is not condemned for the offence which had been pardoned but for a new one: he is not condemned for the breaking the law but for rejecting the gospel.⁵

(Ibid.).

But now the signs of the Bridegroom's approach are coming forth before Him to prepare His way - and He the true Melchizedek is at hand, the Priest of the Most High God, the King of Righteousness, the King of Peace - and yet the treader of the winepress of the wrath of Almighty God.⁶

(Gifts of the Spirit, 1830).

And the hope of good things to come, is the hope of the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, even of Him Who was despised and rejected of men, to reign on the earth in righteousness, and "to purge out of His kingdom all things that offend," "taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel."⁷

(The Brazen Serpent, 1831).

...as the spirit of the parable of the wheat and tares carries us forward to the final judgment, each person is represented in it by that seed, whether good or bad, which gained the ascendancy over him during his life, and which will then distinctly stamp his character. He who has yielded himself to the good seed is called wheat, and he who has yielded himself to the evil seed is called a tare...and when the process is concluded, we shall be found to be wheat or tares, children of the kingdom or children of the wicked one.⁸

(The Doctrine of Election, 1837).

He then who is saved, is saved by grace, but by a grace which every man is free to use - and he who is lost, is lost by refusing grace, which he might have used...⁹

(Ibid.).

(It should be stressed that this is a representative selection of Erskine's utterances about hell from 1828-37, not an exhaustive compilation.)

APPENDIX IV. THE EARLY THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF JOHN McLEOD CAMPBELL, UP TO THE BEGINNING OF 1828.

John McLeod Campbell was born in 1800 at Armaddy House, near Kilninver, Argyllshire, the eldest son of the Rev. Donald Campbell, a Church of Scotland minister.¹ In contrast to Erskine, Campbell was brought up virtually without a mother, since Donald Campbell's wife died in 1806. This fact prompts interesting reflections, given that both men ultimately developed a faith which revolved around the concept of God's universal Fatherhood. At any rate, the period 1811 to 1820 saw the young Campbell studying at Glasgow university with a view to entering the Church of Scotland ministry. Here he discovered the fascinations of natural beauty and read Byron and Shakespeare with enthusiasm. Having completed his divinity course Campbell spent the winter of 1820-21 at Edinburgh university, and it was at this point that he received a call from the Church of Scotland congregation in Hatton Garden, London, Edward Irving's future charge. The call failed to actualise, however, and Campbell had to wait another four years before being inducted to his first pastorate. He filled up the time by studying Jonathan Edwards' Treatise on Religious Affections, the Scottish "common sense" philosophers Stewart and Brown, and in particular Butler's Analogy of Religion. He also read The Force of Truth, the spiritual autobiography of the Anglican Calvinist clergyman and commentator Thomas Scott (the man to whom John Henry Newman claimed that, humanly speaking, he owed his soul²), and was influenced thereby in an Evangelical direction. Campbell openly declared his personal faith in the merits of Christ as the sole source of salvation in 1824.

At last, in May 1825, Campbell was presented by the Duke of Argyll to the Church of Scotland congregation at Row (modern spelling "Rhu"), and ordained to the charge in the September of that year. The parish of Row was on the eastern shore of the Gareloch in Dunbartonshire, bounded on the north by Loch Long and some six miles from Cardross in the south-east. Opposite Row on the western side of the Gareloch stood the parish of Rosneath, whose minister Robert Story had been the fellow student of Edward Irving at Edinburgh university in 1805. Below both Row and Rosneath, on the south side of the Clyde, stood Port Glasgow, which was to assume a poignant significance when the Row controversy entered its charismatic phase.

According to his own account, Campbell began his ministry with a somewhat elementary theology. His father was a Moderate, and Campbell later confessed that he had himself been a disciple of the latitudinarian Archbishop Tillotson in his early days.³ He claimed that at the outset of his ministry at Row the only doctrines that were "realities in my mind" were "the fact of an Atonement and the necessity of regeneration."⁴ He could not subsequently remember what if anything he believed at that time about the extent of the atonement.

As to Election, I was content to hold it simply as a matter of fact, and to excuse myself for not considering it much by regarding it as a mystery...⁵

He determined that he would maintain "a perfect neutrality" in respect to the Evangelical and Moderate parties, and to read only the Bible in preparing his sermons, consulting commentaries only for linguistic and never for theological purposes.⁶

His troubles soon began. To his dismay, he found over his first year that his preaching was manifestly failing to produce the desired effects among his congregation. This sterility he traced to a prevailing legalistic mentality:

I came to see that, in reality, whatever I preached, they were only hearing a demand on them to be - not hearing the Divine secret of the Gospel as to how to be - that which they were called to be. Of this they themselves had no suspicion; they said, and honestly, that they did not question Christ's power to save, neither did they doubt the freeness of the Gospel or Christ's willingness to save them; all their doubts were as to themselves... In this mind the Gospel was practically a law, and the call to trust in Christ only an addition to the demand which the law makes - an additional duty added to the obligation to love God and to love man, not the secret of the power to love God and to love man.

Campbell's parishioners felt that they were not entitled to draw near to Christ without the warrant of some perceived goodness of their own. A barrier of spiritual introspection was thus erected between themselves and trusting Christ. Campbell's solution to this problem was straightforward:

Seeing this clearly, my labour was to fix their attention on the love of God revealed in Christ, and to get them into the mental attitude of looking at God to learn His feelings towards them, not at themselves to consider their feelings towards Him.⁸

Until they were thus persuaded of God's prior love to them, Campbell felt that they could not possibly serve God out of love to Him.

I was gradually taught to see that so long as the individual is uncertain of being the subject of love to his God, and is still without any sure hold of his personal safety in the prospect of eternity, it is in vain to attempt to induce him to serve God under the power of any purer motive than the desire to win God's love for himself, and so to secure his own happiness... And thus I was gradually led to entertain the doctrine commonly expressed by the words "Assurance of Faith", having first seen that the want of it precluded singleness of heart and eye in the service of God, and then having found in studying the Epistles to the first Christian Churches, that its existence, in those addressed, was in them taken for granted, and in every practical exhortation was presupposed. I accordingly began to urge on my own people, that in order to their being free to serve God - in order to their being in a condition to act purely, under the influence of love to Him, and delight in what He is, their first step in religion would require to be, resting assured of His love in Christ to them as individuals, and of their individually having eternal life given to them in Christ.⁹

He hoped his proclamation of the assurance of God's grace would bring his people "under the natural power of the love, the forgiving, redeeming love which was set before them" in the gospel, thus begetting that joyful confidence in Christ which until now had eluded their grasp.¹⁰ From the autumn of 1826, the assurance of God's forgiveness in Christ for sinners thus became Campbell's great theme.

Interestingly, Campbell denies that Calvinism was the cause of the legalistic and doubt-ridden attitudes he was trying to change.

Those who are familiar with our Scottish theology, and know how early it is taught to our children, may, perhaps, be inclined to trace to Calvinistic preconceptions the difficulty found in endeavouring to lead these earnest minds to look simply at the discovery of the mind of God towards sinful man, which He has made who came to reveal the Father. I do not remember that it was so... What I met with in the earnest minds to which I refer was different. It was a difficulty in rising to the conception of free grace - that is, to the apprehension of a love in God to us which is irrespective of what we are, and is sustained by the contemplation of what He both wills us to be and is able to make us.¹¹

This is an important point. Although the train of Campbell's thought was ultimately to carry him beyond Calvinism, we have his mature reflection that Calvinism as such was not the original problem. The problem was the innate legalism of the human heart.

Campbell's view that one could not love or serve God without first being assured of one's "personal safety in the prospect of eternity" led him to the fateful conviction that a faith not characterised by this assurance could not produce love for God and therefore was not true faith at all.¹² This brought him into direct conflict with the widespread view that assurance of salvation was to be derived from the spirituality of one's life as proof of the reality of one's faith. Campbell insisted against this that if one's sense of peace with God depended on one's perceived sanctification, this was de facto justification by works. True faith was self-authenticating:

the light of life is its own protection. He that so knows himself and Christ in the light of Christ has the witness in himself... Fruits of faith are, indeed, given

as a test to be applied to the professions of others, or - it may be - to the doctrine they teach. But how can our own faith be thus tested? We may, and we should, so test what we are called to believe; and we must have evidence of its tendency before submitting to it, or accepting it as of God. But to ask me to stand in suspense as to my trust in Christ - whether it is a right and saving trust - making this depend on the consciousness of fruits of holiness in myself - this is really to suspend trust - that is, to suspend faith - until I am conscious of the effects of faith: a process which, if intelligently followed, obviously makes fruits of faith impossible.¹³

The system of assurance by evidences of holiness, Campbell felt, led only to despair:

the natural - indeed necessary - effect of this teaching on the man himself, who anxiously questioned the reality of his own faith, was to turn the mind in on itself and its own consciousness of goodness, and with a most discouraging result.¹⁴

This, then, was the character of Campbell's preaching from autumn 1826 until roughly the autumn of 1827. Thus far, no public antagonism was generated, except that some of Campbell's parishioners complained that he "carried the subject of assurance too far".¹⁵ Yet in that complaint lay the seeds of the coming storm. This can also be seen from the fact that Campbell records, in a letter to Robert Story dated 9th August 1827, a discussion with his fellow minister Dr. Hamilton of Strathblane on the subject of assurance at a presbytery meeting at Arrochar. Hamilton was a traditional Calvinist who took "the old view" ¹⁶, viz. assurance based on spirituality of life. Campbell tried to bring him round - to no avail, "but I was quite delighted with his fairness and candour in arguing." ¹⁷ The potential for opposition was clearly there, although it had yet to become vocal, widespread or zealous.

It must also be confessed that there does seem to have been a somewhat quirky element in McLeod Campbell's personality, a strain of innocent, confident, tactless self-righteousness, which contributed little to the smoothness of proceedings. His behaviour at the funeral of Isabella Campbell, for instance, was not far short of bizarre. Isabella was a young parishioner of Robert Story's, much admired for her exalted piety, who had died of a wasting disease in late 1827. Story was himself ill and away on a recuperative holiday in England, so it fell to Campbell to conduct Isabella's funeral. The remains of the deceased lady were placed on a steam-boat to be ferried to the burial ground at Lochgoilhead; en route, Campbell gathered all the mourners in the boat together and proceeded to expound to them the doctrine of the assurance of salvation by self-authenticating faith, declaring that Isabella had been a living epitome of this great truth.¹⁸ One cannot help feeling that there must have been a slightly odd element in the personality of a man who could "hijack" a funeral to enunciate his own pet doctrine in this way.

It was in September 1827 that Campbell and A.J. Scott became acquainted with one another when the latter, having just been licensed to preach, conducted a Sunday service for Campbell at Row. Campbell was deeply impressed with his new friend:

I heard him with very peculiar delight. His preaching, though his second Sabbath, was with a sober, solemn composure, that would have seemed a delightful attainment in a man of much experience. The progress he has already made in the divine life, the elevation and clearness of his views, the spirit of love which he breathes in every word, and the single-eyed devotedness to his Master's glory, are to me most delightful illustrations of the power of simple faith. Few old ministers are so intimately acquainted with the Bible, or have so examined the import of its words; and this just because the love of Christ constrains him, and makes it his happiness to study and inquire into all that connects itself with the religion of his Master. Oh glory be unto God for sending such a labourer into the harvest! and Oh that He would send many such! ¹⁹

The meeting was the start of a lifelong friendship.²⁰ H.F. Henderson hints that Campbell may even have fallen under the spell of Scott's personality, delineating Scott as having

"a somewhat commanding nature" as against Campbell's "gentle spirit".²¹

As Philip Newell points out, it could well have been the freshly felt influence of the impressive and articulate Scott which prompted Campbell to move towards a belief in universal atonement as the basis of that assurance of divine love to sinners which was now the burden of his message.

Although a direct connection cannot be drawn between the commencement of the Scott-Campbell friendship and the shift in emphasis in Campbell's preaching [to universal atonement]...it seems more than coincidence that the two events are contemporaneous.²²

Unfortunately we possess no information about the origins and development of Scott's own convictions on this matter, reared as he had been by a staunchly Calvinistic father and trained in dogmatics at Glasgow by a Calvinistic theology professor. Newell seems to feel that it was Scott's meditation on the incarnation, with reference to its revelatory significance, which led him to believe in God's universal salvific love and its manifestation in Christ's universal death.²³ This may well be true, since it fits in with Erskine's testimony concerning a sermon preached by Scott in 1828 in which Scott argued from the incarnation to God's universal love.²⁴ However I know of no evidence that Scott had definitely arrived at a conviction of the universality of the atonement by the time he met Campbell. Campbell's own account clearly states that he and Scott reached their conclusions on this subject independently of each other:

I met them both [Scott and Erskine] forty-three years ago, about the same time, as the first who gave a full response to all that was in my heart of the joy in God through Jesus Christ; having before - each, and each separately - come to the same light of the divine love in which I was rejoicing. A friendship begun in this light of life...[etc].²⁵

It seems more prudent, therefore, to put to one side the question of who influenced whom, and to give preference to Campbell's own testimony about his progress from the assurance of faith to universal atonement. He traces it to the opposition to his preaching of assurance which he began to encounter in the closing months of 1827. His "summer parishioners" - ie. those who spent only the summer months in beautiful Row - returned south, bearing with them reports of Campbell's preaching.²⁶ This stirred up interest and excitement in Evangelical circles in Glasgow, resulting in a paper on assurance being read at Glasgow's theological society. Campbell attended, and was invited to reply to the paper, in which the more traditional doctrine of assurance by "evidences" had been propounded. He viewed the occasion as an opportunity granted him by Providence to witness for the truth:

I went away thankful for the indulgence I had experienced, and full of expectation as to the result of their meditating on what I had been enabled to say.²⁷

The outcome was less than satisfying, as he went on to relate:

The following week I preached a public sermon on a weekday for one of the Glasgow charitable institutions; and I remember, in order to preclude the charge of Antinomianism, while, at the same time, as affording the opportunity of setting forth the practical importance of the Assurance of Faith, I selected as my text John xvii, v. 17, "Sanctify them through Thy truth." Most of the ministers of Glasgow were present, and from this occasion I date the opposition of my brethren. I had fondly hoped that the explanation given in the clerical society would have removed prejudices, and commended the truth. They, however, had calculated on my being changed by what had come from them, and, in consequence, were much offended to hear me so shortly after state so fully what they had condemned; and for many Sabbaths, most of the ministers in Glasgow were preaching with pointed reference to what I taught.²⁸

The sermon at the charitable institution was preached between the 17th and 21st of December 1827. From that week, then, we can date the impetus of opposition which propelled Campbell to a belief in universal atonement. His own account is clear:

The controversy in which I was [from now on] constantly engaged in almost all my intercourse with my brethren urged me to examine narrowly the foundation furnished by the communications made in the Gospel for Assurance of Faith. This led directly to the closer consideration of the extent of the Atonement, and the circumstances in which mankind had been placed by the shedding of the blood of Christ; and it soon appeared manifest that unless Christ had died for all, and unless the Gospel announced Him as the gift of God to every human being, so that there remained nothing to be done to give the individual a title to rejoice in Christ as his own Saviour, there was no foundation in the record of God for the Assurance which I demanded, and which I saw to be essential to true holiness. The next step therefore was my teaching, as the subject-matter of the Gospel, Universal Atonement and Pardon through the blood of Christ.²⁹

The editorial comment of Campbell's son underscores this:

During 1827 the nature of faith had been the most prominent subject; during the two following years he dwelt rather on the object of faith, - namely, Christ's death for all men, forgiveness in Christ for all men.³⁰

Let us interrogate more closely Campbell's shift in emphasis from subjective assurance to objective universal atonement. According to his previously cited testimony, this shift cannot have involved a conversion from limited atonement, since he says he cannot recall ever having believed in that in any case. In fact, regarding the atonement's universal extent, he asserts:

I had never thought otherwise of the Atonement; and whatever elements of Calvinism I was at that time accepting - and, indeed, continued to accept until a date subsequent to my deposition - I do not remember that I ever read the words, "God so loved the world"... "He, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man", otherwise than in their natural and obvious sense. I remember, at an early stage in my brief ministry, my sense of violent striving for logical consistency, when a very devoted minister - to whom I was much drawn by his zeal for religious awakenings - maintained that, when it is said that God loved the world, it is the elect world that is meant.³¹

There is an apparent contradiction here. First Campbell affirms that at the outset of his ministry he cannot recall having had any positive convictions as to the extent of the atonement. But he now affirms that he cannot recall ever having understood the classic universal atonement proof-texts in anything other than a universal sense. Perhaps his ability to remember was at fault somewhere. Or perhaps he meant that whereas he always read the universal texts in a universal sense, the question of the extent of the atonement never presented itself to his mind in its dogmatic form -- that is, as a question of systematic theology in relation to other truths - until late 1827.

Campbell was aware of the "Marrow" teaching that Christ was "dead for all". According to the Marrowmen (a body of Scottish divines of the early eighteenth century, including Thomas Boston and Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine), God was moved by His universal love to make "a deed of gift and grant unto all men" of Christ as Saviour. Christ was thus "dead for all", i.e. the dead Christ, the crucified Saviour, was available for all.³² Campbell knew of this teaching, and refers to it as

that substitute for an Atonement for all, which took the form of saying that in a certain sense Christ was the gift of God to all; that He belonged to all by a Divine deed of gift, such as would be the giving of a man to a regiment as surgeon to the regiment, in virtue of which gift each individual feeling need of him would freely have recourse to him for his help.³³

Such teaching he held to be the "nearest approach to the preaching of a free Gospel which met me in combination with Calvinism".³⁴ Perhaps it told on his own thought; he certainly pointed out the similarity between the Marrow teaching and his own, when respecting the former he said of the Marrowmen that "these men... saw how truly personal appropriation of Christ was the great secret of the power of the Gospel to reconcile man to God"³⁵ - the virtue he was claiming for his own system, with its proclamation of Christ as the

Saviour of each and every individual. But without further evidence we cannot positively conclude that Marrow doctrine had a definite influence on Campbell's articulation of universal atonement, especially not when he calls it "a shift", "that substitute for an Atonement for all".³⁶

Campbell, then, by the beginning of 1828, had moved towards a belief that the sins of all were already pardoned, and that God through Christ was reconciled to all men, so that this simply had to be believed in order to produce love for God. The presence of such a faith, moreover, needed no introspective scrutiny to discover moral fruits of its reality, for faith in the Gospel of Christ's universal death was self-authenticating.

One final point. Had Campbell arrived at his conviction about the universal benefits of the atonement when Erskine first heard him preach in late 1827 or early 1828? We do not know, for we do not know the precise time at which Campbell's reflections on the ground of assurance had burgeoned into a belief in universal atonement. It is not necessary that Campbell should have reached this conclusion in order to justify Erskine's statement that Campbell preached the true Gospel; the mere assertion of God's love for all and the assurance thereof as the only effective motive to holiness would probably have been enough to prompt such a comment from Erskine. But since we have Campbell's word that he reached his beliefs on universal atonement independently of Erskine, the question is not particularly important. All we need to know is that Campbell had certainly reached these convictions by early 1828, and that Erskine already believed them and had published them to the world in the Freeness. Henceforth the two men, together with A.J. Scott, would form a theological trio contending for this doctrine against the traditional Calvinism of the Scottish Evangelical world.

APPENDIX V. THE HISTORICAL PEDIGREE OF EDWARD IRVING'S CHRISTOLOGY.

The antecedents of Irving's Christology form a difficult and involved question, and one which we can examine only briefly. Given Erskine's full-blooded adherence to this highly controversial doctrine, however - and it remains controversial even today - it is of sufficient importance and interest to merit attention.

It can be safely stated that the doctrine of Christ's fallen humanity has no firm roots in patristic theology, despite Irving's passionate asseverations to the contrary.¹ The general tendency of the Christology of the fathers was, if anything, towards a docetic undervaluing of Christ's humanity. Few if any of them taught that the Saviour possessed a sinfully inclined human nature. Augustine, speaking for the Latins, said:

He [Christ] alone, even when made man, still remaining God, never had any sin, nor took sinful flesh, though He took it of the sinful flesh of His mother. For what flesh He took of her, that truly He either purified that it might be assumed, or He purified it in the assumption.²

The Virgin Mary's flesh was sinful, but in the very act of assuming it in the virgin conception, the Logos rendered it sinless. Hence Christ did not have sinful flesh. Consequently Augustine denied that Christ's experience of temptation was identical to that of fallen man:

For he who lusteth after evil things, although resisting his concupiscence, he perpetrate not the evil, fulfils what is written, "Thou shalt not go after thy lusts"; yet he does not fulfill what the law saith, "Thou shalt not covet". Christ, therefore, who most perfectly fulfilled the law, had no evil concupiscence; because that discord between the flesh and the Spirit, which works in the nature of men from the sin of the first man, He was altogether free from, who was born of the Spirit and a virgin, and not by the concupiscence of the flesh... Now the flesh of Christ had nothing unsubdued, nor did it in anything resist the Spirit, so as to be required to be subdued by it.³

This is contrary to Irving's assertion that the negation of sinful inclination in Christ's humanity was a lifelong work of the Spirit.

John of Damascus, summing up for the Greeks, taught that the Logos assumed a humanity consubstantial with ours even in our weaknesses, but not in our moral fallenness:

We confess, then, that He assumed all the natural and innocent passions of man. For He assumed the whole man and all man's attributes save sin. For that is not natural, nor is it implanted in us by the Creator, but arises voluntarily in our mode of life as a result of a further implantation by the devil... The wicked one, then, made his assault [on Christ] from without, not from thoughts prompted inwardly, just as it was with Adam. For it was not by inward thoughts, but by the serpent that Adam was assailed. But the Lord repulsed the assault and dispelled it like vapour, in order that the passions which assailed Him and were overcome might be easily subdued by us, and that the new Adam should save the old.⁴

This quotation makes it clear that Christ's experience of temptation was analogous to that of pre-fall Adam, not a post-fall sinner.

The only early Church father who did broach the idea of a fallen humanity in Christ appears to have been Theodore of Mopsuestia (c.350-428), who gained a reputation in his own day for unsoundness of doctrine on various matters, such as the inspiration of Scripture and the place of human free-will and merit in salvation. The 2nd Council of Constantinople in 553 condemned Theodore in these terms:

If anyone defends the impious Theodore of Mopsuestia, who has said that the Word of God is one person, but that another person is Christ, vexed by the sufferings of the soul and the desires of the flesh, and separated little by little above that which is inferior, and become better by the progress in good works and irreproachable in His manner of life, as a mere man was baptised in the name of the Father, and of

the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and obtained by this baptism the grace of the Holy Spirit, and became worthy of Sonship, and to be worshipped out of regard to the Person of God the Word (just as one worships the image of an emperor) and that He is become, after the resurrection, unchangeable in His thoughts and altogether without sin...let him be anathema.⁵

Any appeal to Theodore of Mopsuestia in support of Irving's Christology would doubtless have hindered not helped Irving's cause.

The eighth century Adoptionists, led by Felix of Urgellis, seem to have followed in Theodore's footsteps in contending that Christ took a fallen human nature. They taught that Christ was born a servant, not a son; by birth He shared in our unregenerate nature, and became regenerate and a son of God in His humanity only by the grace of the Holy Spirit at His baptism. Their concern, like Irving's, was to emphasise the reality of Christ's brotherhood with men and of His human moral experience in a fallen world. They were fiercely opposed by the orthodox, however, and condemned at the Synod of Frankfurt in 794.⁶

The Flemish mystic Antoinette Bourignon (1616-80) held a doctrine similar to Irving's. Irving indeed seems to have been familiar with her Christology, since he quotes her in his Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of our Lord's Human Nature. Madame Bourignon taught that Christ had a twofold human nature, one from pre-fall Adam which was reserved in heaven for Him until the incarnation, the other from fallen Mary. This meant that the incarnate Christ experienced inner moral conflict between His fallen and unfallen natures. Irving quotes Madame Bourignon as saying:

He [Christ] felt in His natural will a rebellion to the will of God in sentiment, but never in consent, and resisted this rebellion which He felt in His corruption, saying, "I came not to do My own will but the will of Him that sent Me". Now if His own will had been so inseparably united to the will of His Father, to what purpose would He have distinguished these two wills, since they were but one? For He gives us sufficiently to understand thereby that His own will was evil since He would not follow it...⁷

Irving thought that the similarity of His own Christology to that of Madame Bourignon prevented him from obtaining a fair hearing. He had in mind the fact that every Church of Scotland minister had to abjure Bourignonism (together with Popish, Arminian, Arian and Socinian errors) in his ordination vow, and that Irving could thus be accused of breaking his vow on account of his "Bourignonian" Christology. He went to some lengths in his Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of our Lord's Human Nature to differentiate his views from Madame Bourignon's, but with little tact since he simultaneously admitted of her doctrines that, "They aim at great truths, but miss the right and just expression of them."⁸ He also addressed his contemporary Christological critics in these infelicitous words:

Poor bewildered Bourignon was both a more honest interpreter of Scripture and a better logician than you, O ye self-sufficient leaders and guides of the religious world! ⁹

Such language merely exacerbated the controversy.

It is interesting to recall at this point that Drummond and Bulloch thought they could detect the influence of Madame Bourignon in Erskine's religious outlook, through the connection of the two figures with Scottish Episcopalianism. We assessed this in chapter I, section (i), note 10, and found it deficient in evidence. But it is still interesting that this association could be made, albeit hypothetically. It shows the strange interconnections in the world of thought in which Irving and Erskine moved.

William Law, as we have seen, espoused a Christology similar to Irving's.¹⁰ So did Abraham Tucker (1705-74), an English philosopher whose Christology appeared in his The Light of Nature Pursued. Tucker argued as follows:

the purpose and effect of the [hypostatic] union was to rectify the sinful nature of Jesus; for that He did partake of a sinful nature by His birth from the woman, I see no reason nor scruple to doubt...He was a descendant of Adam, and when it is

declared that all have sinned, no exception is made of Him: nor is this contradictory to the position of His being without sin. For that relates to the commission of actual sin, which we ourselves were not guilty of in Adam: for none of us were accomplices in the fact of his transgression. Therefore when it is said that in Adam all have sinned, we must necessarily understand thereby... that all have partaken of a nature evidenced by the fall to be too weak and frail to stand against temptation; which nature the child Jesus partook of, sharing it in common with us. Nor are there marks left unrecorded by the Holy Spirit, in the circumstances of the last agony... which indicate a natural imbecility and struggle with carnal law of the members rising in rebellion against the law of the mind...¹¹

Marcus Dods of Belford, Irving's sternest and most theologically erudite critic, referred to Tucker as "the father of the heresy that Christ took a sinful nature"¹², but the present writer has discovered no evidence that Irving read Tucker. It is quite possible that he did, however; Tucker enjoyed considerable popularity for a philosopher, seven editions of his complete writings appearing between 1778 and 1848.

Nearer home, E.T. Vaughan of St. Martin's church, Leicester, has been credited with originating the Irvingite Christology. Vaughan, a friend of Irving's, was an Anglican clergyman of the Calvinistic school, "whose metaphysical subtlety procured him the title of the modern Aquinas".¹³ Alexander Haldane, author of the Lives of Robert and James Haldane, thought that Irving derived his Christology directly from Vaughan, although "Mr. Vaughan's delicacy of perception prevented him going to the same length as his less discriminating disciple".¹⁴ Unfortunately Vaughan remains an obscure figure, and it seems impossible on the evidence available to find out exactly what he did teach and the extent to which Irving was influenced by him.

Several German theologians around this time were promulgating Christologies very similar to that of Irving, such as Gottfried Menken and J.E.W. Gericke, but there was no historical connection.¹⁵

An Irvingite-type Christology was also held in the nineteenth century by the Christadelphians, a sect founded by the English physician John Thomas (1805-71), who began circulating his peculiar views in 1834 in a magazine called The Apostolic Herald. Thomas's successor, Robert Roberts, exegeted ROM.8:3 ("sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh") thus:

It was the same flesh, full of the same propensities, and the same desires, in Christ as in us; for sinful flesh and the likeness of sinful flesh mean the same thing.¹⁶

Or, more fully:

Deriving from His mother both the propensities that lead to sin and the sentence of death that was passed because of sin, He was absolutely sinless as to disobedience, whilst subject to the impulses and consequences of sin. For it was necessary that He should appear in the nature of Abraham and David, which was sinful nature.¹⁷

Whether Thomas or Roberts was influenced by Irving seems to be an unanswered question.

Later in the nineteenth century, the "Cooneyites" (otherwise known as "Go-preachers" or "The Jesus Way") propagated a similar teaching. This small and aggressive sect was founded by a Scot, William Irvine, although deriving its name from its more militant preacher Edward Cooney. They taught that "Jesus overcame His own flesh", and that salvation was found in following His example.¹⁸

In the present century, Karl Barth has given his magisterial seal of approval to an Irvingite Christology, influencing many in this direction. His exposition is located in his Church Dogmatics 1:2, pages 147-59. He mentions Irving approvingly on p.154, but does not claim him as the source of his own interpretation.

One final point which should be taken into account in any consideration of Irving's Christology is his encounter with the unorthodox and quasi-docetic doctrine of Christ's manhood which at that time had a significant following among English Nonconformists. This doctrine stated that Christ's human soul was pre-existent, having been created before the foundation of the world, and that it was only physical flesh that He received from the Virgin Mary. Those who held this view were almost all Hyper-Calvinists who

denied the eternal divine Sonship of Christ,contending that it was His human nature which was begotten from eternity.The idea was furthermore set in the context of a supralapsarian theology in which the Second Person of the Trinity was eternally constituted both archetypal Man and Mediator for the elect.The human race was created in the likeness of Christ the Eternal Man,and the elect were given to Him in mystical marriage logically prior to the decree to permit the fall.²⁰

This Christology had its origins in the early eighteenth century,appearing particularly influentially in Joseph Hussey's The Glory of Christ Unveiled (1706).Hussey (1660-1726) was the father of English Hyper-Calvinism.The most notable proponent of this Christology,however,was the very mild Calvinist Isaac Watts (1674-1748),who expounded the human pre-existence of Christ in The Glory of Christ as God-Man (1746).

Irving referred to this "pestilent error" in several of his writings,especially in his Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of our Lord's Human Nature.He spoke of the ancient Gnostic and dualistic error of Marcionism having been revived

amongst various of the Dissenters and Evangelicals,who do not scruple to use the very language which Marcion used,that His flesh came through the Virgin from God, never the least affected by its transmission.However,let me give my brethren of the Church of Scotland warning,that if they will not hold steadfastly as I am doing and as their fathers did to the consubstantiality of Christ's manhood with our manhood as to its nature,as to its temptations,as to its native inclinations, they will soon be led of Satan into some of those wild delusions which are now springing up in the less restrained,worse disciplined realm of England.²¹

Irving says here that these men held that not even Christ's flesh came from the Virgin Mary: perhaps a misunderstanding or exaggeration on his part,or an even more extreme version of the Hyper-Calvinist Christology.He continued:

it is an error which still exists in the Church,though in a latent form,yet not so latent but that I have had before me several tracts or short treatises written to maintain it within the last few years,and likewise have conversed and argued with some men who are inclined to hold it...They err by making no difference between word and deed,fiat and fact.They err by overlooking the difference between the purpose of God,included all in Christ and foreordained in Him; and that purpose beginning to be effected in outward substance when Christ took flesh of the Virgin...²²

This is a perceptive criticism of the Hyper-Calvinist doctrine of Christ's pre-existent humanity,and also of the Hyper-Calvinist doctrine of the eternal justification of the elect,espoused under a different name by Erskine,as we saw in chapter III,section (i).

The extent to which Irving's own Christology was articulated in reaction to this very odd piece of English heterodoxy is a moot point.The possibility that Irving used the language that he did as an attempt to safeguard the reality of Christ's humanity against Hyper-Calvinist denials thereof should be borne in mind,and may dispose those who do not share Irving's Christology to judge him less harshly.

GLOSSARY OF THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL TERMS.

AMYRALDIANISM. A form of Calvinism, named after the French theologian Amyraut (1596-1664).

Its distinctive teaching is that God's decree to elect some sinners to salvation is logically posterior to His decree to send Christ to make atonement for sin. This means that Christ died conditionally for the sins of all men, in case they should believe, thus attesting God's love for all; but God, foreseeing that none would believe of their own free-will, determined to grant saving faith to some (the elect) so as to give effect to Christ's death.

ANTINOMIANISM. The doctrine that since Christ has fulfilled the moral law for believers, they are exempt from its demands as a way of life.

APOCRYPHA CONTROVERSY. A prolonged contention which, starting in 1824, rent the British and Foreign Bible Society. It led to the separate formation of a Scottish Bible Society. The controversy was over the propriety of circulating in Roman Catholic countries Bibles containing the Apocrypha (books considered to be uninspired and non-canonical by Protestants). Scottish Protestants headed the crusade for a pure canon of Scripture, notably Robert Haldane and Andrew Thomson. The controversy is also known as the Bible Society Controversy.

ARMINIANISM. The Protestant opposite of CALVINISM, after its pioneer Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609). Classic Arminianism is summed up in five points, in antithesis to the five points of Calvinism. Arminianism's five points are: (i) unregenerate man has enough free-will to be able to repent and believe in Christ by his own ultimate choice; (ii) God has predestined to salvation those He foresaw would thus repent and believe; (iii) Christ died in love for all in order to save all, but the cooperation of man's free-will is necessary to make his death effective; (iv) the work of the Holy Spirit in drawing sinners to Christ can be finally resisted by all sinners; (v) true Christians can lapse into a state of total unbelief and be ultimately damned.

AUGUSTINIANISM. The theological system developed from the writings of Augustine of Hippo (354-430). CALVINISM or REFORMED THEOLOGY follows Augustine's anthropology and soteriology.

BEREANISM. A Scottish sectarian movement of the eighteenth century, led by John Barclay (1734-98). The name is taken from ACTS 17:11. For a summary of Berean views, see chapter IV, section (v) of main text.

BOURIGNIANISM. A heresy named after Antoinette Bourignon (1616-80). She believed that Christ had a twofold human nature, one sinless and derived from unfallen Adam, reserved in heaven for Him until the incarnation, the other sinful and derived from the Virgin Mary. The presence in Christ of this sinful nature, she thought, explained such sayings of His as, "Not My will, but Thine be done."

CALVINISM. The Protestant precursor and antithesis of ARMINIANISM. See Introduction to main text for a summary of the five points of Calvinism.

CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT. Modern religious movement characterised by belief in the availability or even the necessity for today's Church of the gifts of the Holy Spirit bestowed on the early Church, as recorded in the book of ACTS, chiefly the gifts of speaking in tongues, prophecy and healing. Some add apostles. The movement is often associated with a belief in a two-stage Christian life, with baptism in the Spirit as the second stage. The term is applied anachronistically to IRVINGISM.

CONCURSUS. A medieval scholastic doctrine taken over by most REFORMED theologians. It means that every event in the universe is positively energised and effected by God as First Cause, including acts of sin.

DEISM. A religious movement which had its zenith in the early eighteenth century. It denied the need for any special divine revelation, arguing that man's natural knowledge of God sufficed to bring him to salvation. Christianity was interpreted as simply a "republication" of this natural knowledge, and Christ was reduced to the status of Teacher and Example.

DISRUPTION. The event in 1843 when 451 ministers of the Church of Scotland formed themselves into the non-established Free Church, in pursuit of the independence of the Church from State authority in internal Church affairs. The Disruptors were all Evangelicals. Their leader was Thomas Chalmers.

EVANGELICALISM. Generally, a description of those Protestants who believe in the supreme authority and infallibility of the Bible, the right and duty of private judgment as to the Bible's teaching, justification by faith alone in Christ's substitutionary death, and the classic catholic doctrines of the Trinity, Christology, etc. In Scotland, a synonym for that party in the Church of Scotland which was characterised by a fervent and stringent belief in the theology of the Westminster Confession, in contrast to MODERATISM.

EXEMPLARISM. A doctrine of the atonement which teaches that Christ set an example, by following which sinners can be saved.

FEDERAL THEOLOGY. A doctrinal scheme which conceptualises the whole of history in terms of God's covenants with mankind (Latin, foedus, covenant). God made the Covenant of Works with Adam, promising eternal life to him and his posterity on condition that Adam should render perfect obedience. To remedy Adam's fall, God instituted the Covenant of Grace, promising eternal life to believers on condition of Christ's perfect obedience and their dependence on it by faith. Many federal theologians add a third Covenant, that of Redemption between God and Christ, whereby God promised to give a people to His Son as a reward of His obedience, this being equivalent to the doctrine of election.

GLASSITES. After the Scottish theologian John Glas (1695-1773). His followers are more often referred to as SANDEMANIANS.

GLOSSOLALIA. The spiritual gift of speaking in tongues.

HIGH CALVINISM. That brand of Calvinism which adheres uncompromisingly to the five points of CALVINISM, particularly limited atonement, disliking attempts to widen the scope of Christ's death.

HYPER-CALVINISM. An extreme form of CALVINISM which denies that all men should be called on to believe savingly in Christ. He died for the elect alone, therefore only the elect have the right to believe in Him for salvation. One may presume one is elect if one finds in oneself the marks of grace - sorrow for sin, desire for holiness, etc.

INFRALAPSARIANISM. A mild form of five point CALVINISM, standing between AMYRALDIANISM and SUPRALAPSARIANISM. According to infralapsarianism, God's decree to elect sinners to salvation is logically prior to His decree to send Christ to atone for sin, so that it is specifically God's love for the elect which forms the necessary and sufficient motive for the coming of Christ. However, the decree of election is posterior to the decree of creation.

IRVINGISM. After Edward Irving (1792-1834). His distinctive teachings related to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, for which see CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT, and the humanity of Christ. On the latter point, Irving held that Christ took a fallen nature in the incarnation, but that its sinful inclinations were neutralised throughout Christ's life by the Holy Spirit. It was only at the resurrection that Christ received an intrinsically sinless nature.

LIBERALISM. A movement of thought within Protestantism, having its origins in the late seventeenth century, but receiving its classic articulation by F.D.E. Schleiermacher in the early nineteenth. Liberal theology rejects the infallibility of the Bible, holding that its truths must be tested against the claims of human science and experience. Liberal theologians in nineteenth century Britain were characterised by a rejection of substitutionary atonement, belief in the universal Fatherhood of God as central to His self-revelation in Christ, and a watering down or denial of the reality of hell.

MARROWMEN. A group of Scottish divines in the early eighteenth century who modified the doctrine of limited atonement. They held that while Christ had died specifically to save the elect, God had nonetheless made a gift of the crucified Christ to all mankind as an

expression of His universal love. They also held that assurance of God's love in this gift was of the essence of faith.

MILLENARIANISM. The belief that Christ will rule this earth for a thousand years when He returns. Only thereafter will the final conflict between good and evil, and the last judgment, take place.

MODERATE CALVINISM. Often a synonym for MORAL GOVERNMENT THEOLOGY, but sometimes used to designate any Calvinist who wishes to lay stress on a universal reference in Christ's death.

MODERATISM. A school of thought and lifestyle in the Church of Scotland, particularly in the eighteenth century. Moderates emphasised the place of reason and culture in Christianity; their more radical members inclined to DEISM. They opposed as fanatical any strong emotions in the religious life, such as were likely to be aroused in revivals. They were the traditional adversaries of the Evangelicals.

MORAL GOVERNMENT THEOLOGY. A "soft" form of CALVINISM which makes God's love His supreme attribute and denies that retributive justice is essential in His dealings with His creatures. Divine punishment springs from God's universal love; sin upsets the harmony and happiness of creation, and must be deterred. Christ's death for sinners was not a satisfaction of any absolute justice in God, but a demonstration of His opposition to sin, in order that He might pardon the penitent without occasioning any illusions about sin's heinousness.

NEONOMIANISM. The doctrine that Christ's death has procured forgiveness for sinners, but that entry into heaven is contingent on the performance of good works.

NON-JURORS. A group of Anglican divines who refused to take the oath of allegiance to William of Orange after the Glorious Revolution of 1689. They were characterised by a high church, sacramental, and ARMINIAN theology.

PELAGIANISM. After the British theologian Pelagius (died c.420). A system of theology which gives human free-will the initiative in man's relationship with God. God's grace simply means the innate capacities of human nature bestowed by the Creator, and the enlightenment of His moral teaching. It is entirely up to man to obey this teaching and thereby to merit heaven.

PENTECOSTALISM. See CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT.

PREMILLENNIALISM. See MILLENARIANISM.

REFORMED THEOLOGY. A synonym for CALVINISM.

REPROBATION. God's eternal decree to pass some sinners by, leaving them in their sins and foreordaining them on that basis to damnation.

ROMANTICISM. A broad cultural movement of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was characterised by a rediscovery of and emphasis on the subjective, emotional and non-rational aspects of human nature, which led to a preoccupation with the individual, particularly the extraordinary individual - the inspired man, the genius, the hero. The intimacies of individual experience were preferred to the abstractions and generalisations of science; nature and history were looked to as sources of strength.

SANDEMANIANISM. After Robert Sandeman (1718-71). A religious movement originating in Scotland under the inspiration of John Glas (hence GLASSITES) and flourishing in the eighteenth century. Sandeman was Glas's son-in-law. Its principal distinctive doctrine was its definition of faith as an essentially intellectual perception rather than an act of will. Sandemans were also anti-Sabbatarian, and rejected any alliance between Church and State.

SEMI-PELAGIANISM. A compromise between AUGUSTINIANISM and PELAGIANISM. Semi-Pelagians reject the notion of meriting heaven and admit that God's will takes the initiative

in salvation, but insist that whether a man is saved or lost depends ultimately on his use of his own free-will. In modern Protestantism this is the teaching espoused under the name of ARMINIANISM.

SUPRALAPSARIANISM. A "hard" form of CALVINISM which places God's decrees of election and REPROBATION prior to His decree of creation. This means that the elect are created in order to be first lost and then saved, to glorify God's mercy, and the reprobate created in order to glorify God's justice in their damnation.

UNIVERSALISM. The belief that all men, perhaps even Satan and his demons, will eventually be saved.

Notes and bibliography.

NOTES.

INTRODUCTION.

- 1 Storr, The Development of English Theology in the Nineteenth Century, p.353.
- 2 Tulloch, Movements of Religious Thought in Britain during the Nineteenth Century, pp.126-7.
- 3 Drummond and Bulloch, The Scottish Church 1688-1843, pp.194,199.
- 4 Franks, A History of the Doctrine of the Work of Christ, vol.II, p.379.
- 5 Ewing, Present Day Papers on Prominent Questions in Theology, Some Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, pp.11-12.
- 6 Letter to Bishop Ewing, 9th July 1870. Memorials of John McLeod Campbell, vol.II, p.279.
- 7 Ewing, op.cit., p.11.
- 8 Ibid., p.10.
- 9 Maurice, Life of F.D.Maurice, vol.I, p.444.
- 10 Mackie, A History of Scotland, p.320. There were at least sixteen murders. The recipient of the bodies was the anatomist, Dr. Alexander Knox, no relation of the theologian of that name.
- 11 Thomson, The Doctrine of Universal Pardon Considered and Refuted, p.299. The argument extends over several pages, from p.289ff.
- 12 Smyth, A Treatise on the Forgiveness of Sins, in Anniversary and Other Discourses, p.116.
- 13 Hamilton, Remarks on Certain Opinions Recently Propagated, Respecting Universal Redemption, pp.38-44.
- 14 See the study by John Murray and Ned Stonehouse, The Free Offer of the Gospel.
- 15 See the article by Alec Cheyne, The Westminster Standards: A Century of Re-appraisal, in Records of the Scottish Church History Society, vol.XIV, pp.199-214.
- 16 Quoted in Ewing, op.cit., p.6.
- 17 Chalmers said of Hill's Lectures in Divinity, "I know of no treatise which professes to exhibit the whole range of theological doctrine, and does it in more of a lucidus ordo than the one that we have fixed upon." Select Works of Thomas Chalmers, vol.VIII, p.261. He also claimed that, "I am not sure if I can recommend a more complete manual of divinity" than Hill's Lectures. Posthumous Works, vol.IX, p.xviii.
- 18 Story, The Church of Scotland, vol.III, p.752.
- 19 Regarding the watchwords "Faith" and "Works", Campbell said that "the former watchword did not imply any real Antinomianism, neither did the latter imply any rejection of the atonement as the ultimate ground of man's acceptance with God." Reminiscences and Reflections, p.181.
- 20 Drummond and Bulloch, op.cit., p.221.
- 21 See chapter IV, section (vii).

CHAPTER I. EARLY YEARS, 1788-1816.

(i) Ancestry and early life.

- 1 Principal Shairp's reminiscences in Letters II, pp.347-8.
- 2 For details of Prof. Erskine, see article in DNB, vol.XVII, pp.431-2. Colonel Erskine was a great-great-grandson of the Earl of Mar, James VI's regent from 1571-2.
- 3 For details of John Erskine, see article in DNB, vol.XVII, pp.432-3, and Sir Henry Moncrieff's Account of the Life and Writings of John Erskine D.D.

- 4 Dr.Thomas Davidson of the Tolbooth,Edinburgh.Quoted in Moncrieff's Life of Erskine, p.478.
- 5 Scott's Guy Mannering,ch.37.
- 6 Moncrieff,op.cit.,p.265.The theological contrast between the two men is enshrined in the following anecdote.One morning,it is said,Robertson preached to his congregation on the beauty of virtue; if only virtue were to be seen in all its loveliness on earth,men would fall down and worship it.In the afternoon,Erskine preached to the same congregation that virtue had been seen on earth by men,in Jesus Christ,Who was virtue incarnate,and men had crucified Him!
- 7 Hanna,Letters I,p.8.
- 8 Ibid.,p.15.
- 9 Moncrieff,op.cit.,p.11.
- 10 Drummond and Bulloch,Scottish Church History 1688-1843,pp.194-5."Erskine was a Scottish Episcopalian by birth and upbringing.Consequently his family background was one that rejected the national Calvinism" (p.194).They suggest that Scottish Episcopalians were influenced by Bourignianism in the early eighteenth century,and that this influence,which they associate with a belief in God's universal love and a stress on sanctification,filtered to Erskine."Erskine inherited such thoughts,and though he respected Calvinism he did not share it" (p.195).This evaluation is problematic.The statement that Erskine "respected Calvinism but did not share it" is contradicted by the facts in the period 1816-30,as we shall see.The influence of Bourignianism is more debatable.There is no doubt that the writings of the Flemish mystic Antoinette Bourignon (1616-80) did exercise a certain influence on Scottish Episcopalians in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.However,it was limited to a small group based in the north-east of Scotland.This influence has been painstakingly documented by G.D.Henderson in his Mystics of the North-East.Lord Forbes of Pitsligo, Lord Deskford, Dr.George Garden and his brother James (Professor of Divinity in Aberdeen University), and Dr.James Keith seem to have been the central figures in this select circle.Dr.George Garden was deposed from the Church of Scotland ministry for his Bourignian views,and in 1711 the General Assembly passed an act requiring a repudiation of Bourignianism (along with Popish,Arminian,Arian and Socinian heresies) in its ordination vows.This act was repealed in 1889.(For a brief account of Bourignianism and its relevance to this thesis,see Appendix V: The historical pedigree of Edward Irving's Christology).The peak period of Bourignian influence was 1700-10,according to Henderson,after which it died away.Henderson thinks that by 1713 "this phase had practically passed,and the group in the North-East had become devout disciples of a leader of a higher type,Madame Guyon" (p.14).He also points out the fewness of those involved in this mystical movement: "There were many Episcopalians...who would have had no sympathy with such religious ideas as those to which this particular group were devoted" (p.31).He refers to them as "a not entirely negligible number of intelligent men of good position" (pp.31-2).That is: between 1700 and 1710,a not entirely negligible number of upper class Episcopalians in the north-east of Scotland were influenced by Madame Bourignon.This seems a flimsy basis on which to suggest that Thomas Erskine in the 1790's was the recipient of this influence.
- 11 Letters I,p.381.
- 12 Stanley's reminiscences,in Letters II,p.293.
- 13 Ibid.,p.287.However,Erskine added: "And this,I think,is the one single spiritual benefit which I have derived from the Church of England."
- 14 Letter to Davie,Christmas Day 1837.Letters I,pp.298-9.Cf.letter to James MacKenzie, 2nd January 1837: "The Church of England is a good,quiet,orderly system." Letters I, p.248.He put a different slant on this in a letter to Christian,28th July 1837: "The

Church of England is a beautiful thing, but it is very unlike the carpenter's Son and the fishermen of Galilee." Ibid., p.256.

- 15 The state of Episcopalianism in Scotland at this period was not healthy. It had been under a cloud since the Revolution of 1689, a cloud which grew darker on account of the Jacobite uprisings of 1715 and 1745, in which Episcopalians were implicated through their non-juring allegiance to the Stuarts. As a consequence, severe penal laws restricted their religious activities; Episcopalian clergy were not even permitted to exercise their ministry. The enforcement of these laws was relaxed in 1760 on George III's accession; the clergy resumed their duties more openly and congregations erected Episcopalian chapels. But there was little denominational unity, since the penal laws still inhibited the bishops from carrying out effective oversight. Muddle, irregularity and local variety were the order of the day until 1811, when a synod enjoined strict adherence to the Book of Common Prayer in worship. On Charles Edward Stuart's death in 1788, the Episcopal clergy transferred their allegiance to the House of Hanover and prayed for George III in their services. This opened the door to greater toleration, and in 1792 a bill was passed at Westminster enabling the Episcopal clergy to exercise their ministry legally. One of the bill's terms was that the clergy declare their belief in the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. Many of them objected vigorously to this, however, on the ground that article seventeen taught a Calvinistic doctrine of predestination. Although they were persuaded to acquiesce in a declaration of general adherence to the Articles, this opposition to article seventeen reveals the theological climate of the Scottish Episcopal Church as decidedly Arminian. In W. Stephen's words: "With puritanism in any shape Scottish Episcopacy had no sympathy. Its teachings and traditions had uniformly been of the Caroline school as represented by Andrewes, Laud and Cosin, and by the later non-juring divines" (History of the Scottish Church, vol. II, p.581). This fact was demonstrated when two Anglican clergymen, Gerard Noel and Edward Craig, both Evangelicals, came north around 1821 and felt it necessary to criticise their Episcopal brethren for their hostility to Calvinism. (Noel was a friend of Erskine's; they spent some months together in Rome and Geneva in 1824). A decade later, it was Alexander Ewing's dissatisfaction with Calvinism which moved him to enter the Episcopal Church as a haven from predestinarian dogma.
- 16 Introductory Essay to Baxter's "The Saints' Everlasting Rest", pp.v-vi. The first five pages of this essay are an almost hagiographic tribute to the seventeenth century Puritans.
- 17 Erskine's mature views on the high Episcopalian doctrine of the eucharist were that it was "an unintelligible mystery, a necromancy, which says nothing either to the reason or to the heart." Letter to Lady Caroline Charteris, 6th October 1858. Letters II, p.128. To Bishop Ewing he wrote: "If nothing which enters into the mouth can defile a man, may we not infer that nothing which enters into the mouth can purify a man?" Letter to Bishop Ewing, 4th October 1860. Present Day Papers on Prominent Questions in Theology, Some Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, p.24.
- 18 Scott and Irving were, if anything, ultra-Calvinistic in background. Scott's father, an Evangelical Church of Scotland minister, was a high Calvinist; Irving had a Seceding boyhood, and as late as 1830, when the controversy over his Christology was raging, he proclaimed himself a supralapsarian, denouncing infralapsarianism as heresy. See his The Opinions Circulating Concerning our Lord's Human Nature tried by the Westminster Confession of Faith, p.12.
- 19 Quoted by Bishop Ewing in Present Day Papers on Prominent Questions in Theology, Some Further Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, p.21.
- 20 Letter to Rachel Erskine, 9th May 1827. Letters I, pp.116-7.
- 21 Cf. Principal Shairp: "among these, his kindred, he passed a childhood and youth sheltered from those early shocks and jars which probably lie at the root of much of the unkindness and asperity there is in the world." Reminiscences in Letters II, p.348.

- 22 Letter to Miss Christian Erskine, 7th September 1826. Letters I, p. 79.
- 23 Letter to Chalmers, 12th December 1822. Ibid., p. 43. Cf. letter to Lady Elgin, 18th March 1834: "holiness consists in hearing Christ and following Him step by step in the minutest part of the minutest duty, and in acknowledging an ordinance of Christ in all the natural and social relations." Ibid., p. 207.
- 24 Letter to J.M. Campbell, 14th March 1836. Ibid., p. 238.
- 25 Letter to Rachel Erskine, 11th March 1836. Ibid., p. 237.
- 26 Letter to Adolph Monod, 17th March 1851. Letters II, pp. 265-6.
- 27 Reminiscences in ibid., p. 351.
- 28 More recent accounts which favour this view include Storr, The Development of English Theology in the Nineteenth Century, pp. 354-5; Vidler, The Church in an Age of Revolution, p. 63; and Reardon, Religious Thought in the Victorian Age, p. 398. Storr goes as far as to say that Erskine "was not interested in theological controversy" (p. 354), and Reardon says that, "For the religious controversy which was so much a feature of the time he had no taste at all" (p. 398). They may be following Tulloch, who claims that "while Mr. Erskine never personally attacked the dogmas of the church, he yet in all his writings tended quietly to subvert them". Movements of Religious Thought in Britain during the Nineteenth Century, p. 132.
- 29 All from one particularly vitriolic outburst in Introductory Essay to Extracts of Letters to a Christian Friend from a Lady, p. xxiv.
- 30 Gifts of the Spirit, p. 23.
- 31 Tulloch, despite his remarks about Erskine's noninvolvement in religious controversy, recognises the strong element of dogmatism in his character. Op.cit., pp. 153-4. Dean Stanley says that one of Erskine's peculiar features was a combination of "sweetness and command". Reminiscences in Letters II, p. 294.
- 32 Letter to Rachel Erskine, 15th August 1838. Letters I, p. 325.
- 33 Letter to Christian, 25th September 1802. Ibid., p. 13.
- 34 Letter to Rachel Erskine, 1828. Ibid., p. 9.
- 35 Miss Porteous by name. Letter to Christian, 25th September 1802. Ibid., p. 13.
- 36 Cockburn, Memorials of his Time, p. 3.
- 37 Ibid., pp. 10-11.
- 38 Sir Walter Scott as quoted by Hanna in Letters I, p. 12. Scott had attended the High School and suffered under Nicol. The Haldane brothers and John Campbell the missionary also suffered under Nicol. Campbell's biographer says that Nicol was "a good scholar, but a bad teacher; being exceedingly passionate, and without experience." Philip, The Life, Times and Missionary Enterprises of the Rev. John Campbell, p. 8.
- 39 According to Hanna. Letters I, p. 12.
- 40 Cockburn, op.cit., p. 5. Cockburn says that, "He was born to teach Latin, some Greek and all virtue."
- 41 According to Hanna. Letters I, p. 12. Cf. Henderson: "Adam was a man of great personality and force, and commanded an extraordinary influence over the rising generation of Scottish youth..." Erskine of Linlathen, p. 15.
- 42 Cockburn, op.cit., p. 6.
- 43 Ibid., p. 4.
- 44 Shairp's reminiscences in Letters II, p. 352.
- 45 Cockburn says that he and his fellows were so overjoyed to leave the despised instit-

ution that they spent a whole day celebrating their liberation,during which they erected a pillar of stones in the glen between Braid and Blackford Hills.Op.cit., p.12.

46 The earliest preserved letter is transcribed by Hanna in Letters I,p.9.It is dated 1795,addressed to Lady Graham of Airth,and contains nothing significant.

47 Letter to Christian,25th September 1802.Ibid.,p.12.

48 Ibid.,p.13.

49 Letter to Christian,23rd October 1802.Ibid.,pp.14-15.

50 Ibid.,p.15.

(ii) The legal profession and spiritual turmoils.

1 According to Hanna.Letters I,p.15.

2 Ibid.,p.16.

3 He had been deprived of his brother's companionship for some time prior to this when James had served in the armed forces from 1805-10.Ibid.,p.18.But the fact of James' actual marriage would have brought about a deeper emotional separation.

4 Letter to Madame Forel,November 1845.Letters II,p.51.

5 Article John Foster in DNB,vol.XX,p.58.

6 The political situation in Ireland in the 1790's was explosive.The civil rights of the Irish were severely restricted; no Irishman,for instance,was even allowed to sit in the Irish parliament.The Irish democrats found a militant voice in the Society of United Irishmen,and civil war flared up in 1798 under French inspiration.From 1792 the British government took repressive measures against political reformers and agitators.Foster thus almost became one of the victims of the anti-revolution scare which gripped the governing classes of Britain from 1792 onwards.

7 Quoted in Hanna's Memoirs of Chalmers,vol.III,p.402.Chalmers was acquainted personally with Foster.

8 DNB,vol.XX,p.59.

9 Ibid.,p.59.Foster is not referring merely to established state churches.William Jay castigated Foster for his hostility to the visible church: "who can commend his wish to break up all church-institutions and orders,leaving religion to individual influence and exertion; or at most to domestic?" Autobiography of William Jay,p.406.

10 See Jay,op.cit.,p.406.Indisputably an eccentric opinion for a Baptist preacher.

11 Life of Foster,vol.II,p.237.A long letter to Edward White the annihilationist is devoted to this subject on pp.232-44 of this volume.

12 Foster referred to himself as a "sterling Calvinist".Life of Foster,vol.I,p.460. William Jay testifies to Foster's Calvinistic views of sin and grace: "I never knew a person...who had such views of the badness and depravity of human nature.He seemed to regard it as a mass of entire corruption,and especially of aversion in everything towards God; so that he saw nothing in it capable of being altered,or improved into something better; and religion was not with him a transformation,by the renewing of the mind; but a perfect reproduction and substitution of other powers,through the power of God." Jay,op.cit.,p.406.

13 Essays,pp.4,10.

14 Perhaps the fact that Erskine read Foster soon after his eldest sister Ann's death in May 1805 gave the essay's theme of eternity even greater power over Erskine.At any rate,he felt Foster to be consistently powerful on this theme.In later life he had a copy of some of Foster's sermons,given him by Charles Stuart of Dunearn,and

he sent it to Christian from Geneva in 1839 with the comment: "I was forcibly struck by many things in them...I have read them over again with increased satisfaction and impression. He brings the invisible world and eternity to bear with much force upon the mind as the regulator of our feelings here in time." Letters I, p.358.

15 Essays, p.5.

16 Foster's influence on Erskine was underscored by Henderson: "From the perusal of that famous work On a Man's Writing Memoirs of Himself his mind received a bias which it never afterwards lost; and he imbibed ideas that were destined to influence him to the last, and through him many others in the world...This was the period when serious thoughts took possession of Erskine's mind." Erskine of Linlathen, p.17.

17 Quoted in Hanna's Memoirs of Chalmers, vol.I, pp.226-7.

18 The Spiritual Order, pp.82-3.

19 Hanna, Letters I, p.17.

20 The term "wonderful", prior to the present century, was commonly employed to mean "supernatural", "miraculous". The OED's second definition of "wonder!!" is: "A deed performed or an event brought about by miraculous or supernatural power; a miracle."

21 The argument runs: "A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined...When anyone tells me that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself whether it be more probable that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact which he relates should really have happened. I weigh the one miracle against the other; and according to the superiority which I discover, I pronounce my decision and always reject the greater miracle. If the falsehood of his testimony would be more miraculous than the event which he relates, then and not till then can he pretend to command my belief or opinion." Hume's Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding, section 10:90, 91.

22 Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion, p.12, where he calls the Analogy "a most valuable and philosophical work on the analogy of natural and revealed religion." Cf. Miss Wedgwood's journal, Letters II, pp.169-70, where Erskine endorses Butler's argument that moral difficulties in the Bible are matched by analogous difficulties in life at large.

23 Drummond and Bulloch's suggestion. Scottish Church History 1688-1843, p.196. Jenyns' moral approach was similar to Erskine's. Andrew Fuller, whose views on the atonement were those of the early Erskine, also took this approach in his The Gospel Its Own Witness (1799).

24 Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion, pp.183ff. 3rd edition, 1821.

25 See chapter II, section (ii).

26 The Spiritual Order, pp.82-3.

27 Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion, pp.11-12.

28 Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit, p.319.

29 He mentions an earlier one in a letter to Chalmers, 5th September 1818. Letters I, p.25.

30 Letter to Rachel Erskine, 5th November 1826. Ibid., p.85.

31 Hanna, Letters I, p.18. We have only Hanna's word for this detail, but there is no reason to doubt it.

CHAPTER II. WRITER AND TRAVELLER, 1816-1827.

(i) Laird of Linlathen and "Salvation".

- 1 The discourses were published in January 1817 and went through nine editions in a single year.
- 2 Oliphant, Life of Irving, vol. I, p. 74.
- 3 The incident is recorded without detail by Hanna in Letters I, p. 18.
- 4 Henderson, Erskine of Linlathen, p. 13.
- 5 Letter dated 22nd September 1816. Letters I, p. 20.
- 6 Letter to Mrs. Burnett, daughter of Charles Stuart of Dunearn, 2nd September 1816. Ibid., pp. 19-20.
- 7 Wedgwood, Nineteenth Century Teachers, p. 75.
- 8 Letter to A. J. Scott, 11th February 1864. Letters II, p. 147.
- 9 Letter to Christian, 10th October 1838. Letters I, p. 330.
- 10 Letter to Dr. Wylie of Carlisle, dated 1866. Ibid., pp. 18-19. Cf. letter to Christian, 9th September 1823: "I never knew anyone who was acquainted with James without loving him. There was a mixture of gentleness, and melancholy, and sensitiveness, and manliness, and modesty, and intelligence, and truth in his composition, that I never saw except in himself." Ibid., p. 53.
- 11 Moncrieff, Life of John Erskine, p. 11, footnote.
- 12 Wedgwood, op. cit., p. 75.
- 13 See above, note 8.
- 14 Letter to Mrs. Gurney, 14th May 1862. Letters II, p. 253.
- 15 Letter to Dr. Wylie. Letters I, p. 19.
- 16 Letter dated 22nd September 1816. Ibid., p. 20.
- 17 Cockburn and Jeffrey were on holiday with Erskine in Geneva in 1823. There is a letter extant from Cockburn to Erskine dated 19th October 1830, in which Cockburn refers to Erskine as "my dear Tom". It is evident from a letter of Erskine to Lord Rutherford dated 14th October 1852 that Erskine was still in contact with Fullerton at this date. Rutherford was himself a Scottish judge (as well as Solicitor-general of Scotland in 1837 and Lord Advocate in 1839) with whom Erskine had friendly relations.
- 18 It is somewhat ironic that these two Scottish saints, Erskine and Rutherford, should thus have been coupled. Rutherford was a supralapsarian Calvinist and asserter of iure divino Presbyterianism; Erskine was the most moderate of Calvinists who became a Universalist and who did not care for particular forms of church government. Oddly, though, both men denied that retributive justice was one of God's essential attributes. They were also both celebrated in their own day for their doctrinal writings, but remembered by posterity for their letters. It is fitting that Chalmers should have forged the link between them since his theology lay somewhere between theirs.
- 19 Salvation, pp. xii-xiii. (I have listed this essay in the bibliography simply as Erskine's Introductory Essay to Rutherford's Letters.)
- 20 Ibid., p. viii.
- 21 Ibid., pp. xi-xii, xv.
- 22 Ibid., pp. xvii-xviii.
- 23 Ibid., p. xix.
- 24 The first person lucidly to state the moral government theory of the atonement was

the Dutch Arminian jurist, Huġo Grotius (1583-1645). It was taken up and developed by the New England Calvinists, Joseph Bellamy (1719-1790), Jonathan Edwards Junior (1754-1801) and Timothy Dwight (1752-1817), and became the standard New England theory of the atonement. It was disseminated in Britain principally by Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) and Edward Williams (1750-1813). For a discussion of moral government theology as developed by New England divines, see ch. 7 of Joseph Haroutunian's Piety versus Moralism: the passing of the New England Theology.

25 Note also Erskine's extended governmental analogy in Salvation, pp. xiii-xv. He here makes it explicit that law is rooted in benevolence, i.e. the wish of the government to promote the welfare of the governed.

26 The moral government views of Ralph Wardlaw (1779-1853) had been clearly stated only two years before Erskine wrote Salvation, in his Discourses on the Principal Points of the Socinian Controversy (1814). Andrew Fuller's somewhat eclectic views on the subject will be found conveniently gathered in a volume entitled The Atonement of Christ and the Justification of the Sinner arranged from the writings of the Rev. Andrew Fuller.

27 Unless Charles Stuart of Dunearn had something to do with it. See section (ix) of present chapter.

28 Salvation, p. xxi.

29 Ibid., p. xx.

30 Ibid., p. xxi.

31 Franks, A History of the Doctrine of the Work of Christ, vol. II, pp. 206-7.

(ii) Thomas Chalmers and the evidence controversy.

1 Quoted Hanna, Memoirs of Chalmers, vol. II, p. 177.

2 Quoted Hanna, Letters II, p. 111, footnote.

3 Erskine's ignorance of historical theology has been noted by others. Eg. Franks: "Erskine seems to have obtained his doctrines by independent Bible study and reflection, and to have been without much knowledge of the previous history of theology. He had no consciousness of the relation of his views to older forms of doctrine." A History of the Doctrine of the Work of Christ, vol. II, p. 387. He may be following Tulloch who says: "He [Erskine] has no consciousness of the real relation of his views to the older theology, or again to Arminianism, or again how far he was merely reviving or bringing forth anew, aspects of ancient doctrine... he had never been a student of theology in any scientific sense, nor indeed in any large traditional sense." Movements of Religious thought in Britain during the Nineteenth Century, pp. 144-5.

4 Erskine described the weakness of his eyes thus: "Their sight has always been perfectly good, but when I use them above an hour they become irritated and sub-inflammation comes on, and if I persevere they become so inflamed as to be unable to bear light at all, and I am obliged to lie by for a week or more. I cannot sleep unless light is thoroughly excluded; and as you know that there are few houses, either in England or in Germany, properly supplied with window-shutters, I am obliged when I travel to carry a thick plaid with me to fasten upon the windows. What the cause of this over-sensibility of the eye is I could never get anyone to explain to me." Letter to Lady Caroline Charteris, 7th July 1857. Letters II, p. 115.

5 "He used to say to me that he had such a thirst for learning, and admiration of it, that he believed he would have made himself a learned man, had it not been for the early failure of his eyesight." Principal Shairp's reminiscences, in ibid., p. 372.

6 Letter to Chalmers, autumn 1818. Letters I, p. 23.

7 This practice of translating and paraphrasing Scripture was habitual with Erskine. He

commonly studied the New Testament in the Greek original. His skills as a translator were treated dismissively by his theological opponents. See, for instance, chapter III, section (ii).

- 8 Letter to Erskine, 15th October 1818. Hanna, A Selection from the Correspondence of the late Thomas Chalmers, p.315.
 - 9 Mearns, Principles of Christian Evidence, p.195.
 - 10 Chalmers, Evidence and Authority of the Christian Revelation, p.251.
 - 11 Ibid., p.173.
 - 12 Ibid., pp.231-2.
 - 13 Cited by Hanna, Memoirs of Chalmers, vol.I, p.368.
 - 14 Chalmers, op.cit., p.vi. Cf. his letter to Dr. Stuart in between the publications of the article and book: "I feel greatly interested in the subject of our last conversation, and as you may have perceived from what I said, I have not arrived at a right settlement of opinion about it. That many reach saving faith without any knowledge of the external evidence of religion is undeniable; and that external evidence does not necessarily draw along with it saving faith, is equally so. Still, however, I cannot think that any antecedent knowledge of ours as to the ways of God entitles us to sit in judgment upon the subject of any message accredited by those external proofs which are a sign to those who do not believe." Hanna, Memoirs of Chalmers, vol.I, p.368.
 - 15 Edinburgh Christian Instructor, vol.XIV, January 1817, p.35.
 - 16 Ibid., pp.34-5.
 - 17 Ibid., p.39.
 - 18 The reviewer accuses Chalmers of reducing the morality of the Bible to "the mere ground of authority". Ibid., p.35.
 - 19 Ibid., p.36.
 - 20 Its full title was Principles of Christian Evidence, illustrated by an examination of arguments subversive of Natural Theology and the Internal Evidence of Christianity advanced by Dr.T.Chalmers in his "Evidence and Authority of the Christian Revelation".
 - 21 "If these moral perceptions of ours are fallacious - if they do not inform us of an eternal and immutable distinction between right and wrong - where is it possible to find a foundation on which any revelation may build a claim to conviction or obedience?" Mearns, op.cit., p.89.
 - 22 Mearns, ibid., pp.193-5.
 - 23 Ibid., pp.78ff.
 - 24 For Thomson, see Edinburgh Christian Instructor, vol.XI, July 1815, p.35. For Erskine, see Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion, pp.183ff. 3rd edition, 1821.
 - 25 "It astonished us to see the unrelenting severity with which Dr.Mearns pursued Dr. Chalmers through this whole work. The most calloused and hackneyed common executioner could not display greater want of feeling toward the unhappy culprit on whom he was to perform his office than Dr.Mearns has displayed towards Dr.Chalmers." Edinburgh Christian Instructor, vol.XVIII, March 1819, p.203.
- (iii) "Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion."
- 1 "The Edinburgh 'Christian Instructor', prompt as that organ of the Evangelical party in Scotland was to detect the slightest deviation from Calvinistic Theology, found nothing to find fault with, had nothing but lavish and unlimited praise to bestow. And

- yet many of those views which, when more fully expressed afterwards, met with so severe a condemnation, are to be found here in more than their germ." Hanna, Letters I, p.29.
- 2 In Tract 73. See next section.
 - 3 In one reviewer's words: "We need hardly add that the Author's opinions are what are usually termed evangelical." Eclectic Review, August 1821, p.185.
 - 4 Cf. Erskine's own description given after the first publication of the Remarks: "the object of the Essay... was to demonstrate the reality of the Christian doctrines, ie. of the facts attributed by Scripture to God's government, by proving their harmony with the character of God, and their adaptation to the needs of men. If this proof is made out, the reality of the facts is the inference to be drawn from it." Erskine's italics. Letter to Charles Stuart, 1st February 1821. Letters I, p.34.
 - 5 The opening argument of the Remarks bears an interesting similarity to that of Chalmers' Evidence and Authority of the Christian Revelation. Chalmers begins his book with a discussion of methodology. He distinguishes two ways of verifying a report - the ways of internal and external evidence - and rejects the former as applied to God. Erskine also opens by distinguishing two verification methods, but focuses on the method of internal evidence, which he proceeds to apply to God. One is tempted to conclude that Erskine deliberately modelled the opening of the Remarks on that of Chalmers' earlier work with the intention of refuting it.
 - 6 Remarks, pp.8,31.
 - 7 Ibid., p.14.
 - 8 Ibid., p.9.
 - 9 The idea that happiness is ultimately attainable through evil "sounds very much like the contradiction of an intuitive truth". Ibid., p.20. "The fact... that the greatest natural evil does not always fall where moral evil is most conspicuous... gives rise to the idea of a future state." Ibid., p.31.
 - 10 Ibid., p.14.
 - 11 Ibid., pp.15,16.
 - 12 Ibid., p.16.
 - 13 As he puts it succinctly in the 1821 edition: "The design of the atonement was to make mercy towards this offcast race consistent with the honour and holiness of the Divine government." Ibid., p.102.
 - 14 Ibid., p.34.
 - 15 Ibid., p.40.
 - 16 Ibid., p.44.
 - 17 Ibid., p.75.
 - 18 Ibid., p.76.
 - 19 Ibid., pp.77-80.
 - 20 J.S. Candlish, Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, in British and Foreign Evangelical Review, vol.22, January 1873, p.113.
 - 21 Remarks, p.33. This is a theme which recurs in the Remarks and in Erskine's later writings. The gospel of Christ, not the precepts of the law, provides the true incentive to repentance. This was in Erskine's day a view held predominantly by Sandemanians in Scotland. See Morris's Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Rev. Andrew Fuller, p.133. Erskine held a Sandemanian doctrine of faith, and it seems quite plausible that Sandemanian influence is also present in his view of law and gospel.

22 Remarks,p.76.

23 Ibid.,p.27,footnote (1821 edition; p.28 in 7th edition and onwards).

24 Cf.2 TIM.2:25: "if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth." The Greek is μηποτε δωη αυτοις ο θεος μετανοιαν εις επιγνωσιν αληθειας. Μηποτε plus the subjunctive indicates contingency,uncertainty.This is not to say that mercy is not essential in God's character.But the actual exercise of mercy in any given context is a matter of sovereign discretion on God's part.It is not "necessary". It is optional.

25 "The Bible is the only perfectly pure source of Divine knowledge".Remarks,p.70."He [the Spirit] is represented as dictating originally the revealed Word".Ibid.,p.77.

(iv) Two reviews of the "Remarks".

1 The Remarks had reached its ninth edition by 1829.Later editions were slightly altered and expanded.The Edinburgh Christian Instructor was a monthly periodical founded by Dr.Andrew Thomson,minister from 1814 of St.George's,Edinburgh.He was its editor.

2 Thus indicating that the reviewer saw Erskine's Remarks as a reply to Chalmers' Evidence and Authority of the Christian Revelation.Edinburgh Christian Instructor, vol.XXII,April 1823,p.243.

3 Ibid.,p.254.

4 Ibid.,p.253.

5 Ibid.,p.256.

6 Ibid.,p.248.

7 Ibid.,p.248.

8 Ibid.,p.249.

9 Ibid.,p.256.

10 Letter to G.F.Edwards,2nd January 1883.Quoted Reardon,Religious Thought in the Victorian Age,pp.400-1.Erskine and Newman had no personal contact with each other.In spite of his attack on Erskine in Tract 73,Newman said of Erskine in the same publication that he was "an author,concerning whom personally I have no wish to use one harsh word,not doubting that he is better than his own doctrine,and is only the organ,eloquent and ingenious,of unfolding a theory,which it has been his unhappiness to mistake for the Catholic faith revealed in the Gospel." Tract 73,p.15.In his letter to Edwards in 1883 Newman says of Erskine,"I have always heard him spoken of with great respect as a man of earnest and original mind." Quoted Reardon,op.cit., p.401.Erskine read Newman's Apologia pro Vita Sua in 1864,the year of its publication. Letter to Bishop Ewing,10th December 1865.Present Day Papers on Prominent Questions in Theology,Some Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen,p.55.

11 Newman,Tract 73,p.17.On p.24 he quotes 2 COR.2:15-16,ROM.10:22-23,ACTS 17:31 and REV.22:12 against Erskine's "utilitarian" view of truth.

12 Ibid.,p.23.

13 Ibid.,p.24.

14 Remarks,p.59.

15 Newman,Tract 73,p.28.

16 Ibid.,p.30.

17 Ibid.,p.13.

18 He calls it "the revival of religious feeling during the last century".Ibid.,p.54.

19 Ibid.,p.54.

20 Ibid.,pp.54-5.

(v) James Haldane, David Russell and Broughty-Ferry.

1 See end of chapter I,section (ii).

2 Haldane later attacked Ralph Wardlaw and his moderate Calvinist brethren on the same point: "Far be it, then, from those who love the Lord to represent the atonement as an expedient for the exhibition of public justice, instead of being an actual satisfaction to the justice of God." The Doctrine of the Atonement, with Strictures on recent publications of Drs. Wardlaw and Jenkyn (1845), quoted in Alexander Haldane, Lives of the Haldanes, p.598. The italics are Haldane's.

3 Letter to Charles Stuart, 19th January 1821. Letters I, p.34.

4 According to Hanna, "These letters had this additional interest to Mr. Erskine, that a number of them were originally addressed, with the happiest effect, to one of his sisters." Ibid., p.49, footnote.

5 Also in 1810 the pastorates of the Barrack Street and West Port Independent churches in Dundee fell vacant. Many members of the former joined Russell's church, and the latter united with it. West Port chapel became the meeting place of the augmented congregation. See Ross, A History of Congregational Independency in Scotland, p.223.

6 Hanna says that Erskine began worshipping at West Port chapel after the marriage of his sister Davie in September 1821, she and her husband selecting it as their local church. Letters I, p.381. This does not necessarily mean that Erskine had never worshipped there before; it may mean simply that he now attended its services on a regular basis. The Erskine family must have been acquainted with Russell prior to this in the light of the information recorded in note 4.

7 In the words of William Lindsay Alexander: "his [Russell's] sentiments were closely conformed to those commonly designated moderate Calvinism. He had learned much from Fuller, Williams, and MacLean, of whose writings he had been a diligent student, and continued to the last an admiring reader. Like most of the Congregational preachers of his day, he owed something also to the writings of Glass and Sandeman..." The Good Man's Grave: A Discourse Occasioned by the Lamented Death of David Russell D.D., p.24.

8 See Letters, Chiefly Practical and Consolatory, p.340. "Our offended Judge had love enough in his heart to have saved the guilty without an atonement... But as such a proceeding must have dishonoured His government, and have held up an encouragement to rebellion, His love was manifested in a way which, by the union of mercy and truth - of righteousness and peace, sheds the most exhilarating light on the sanctions of His law, and the justice of His government." See also his Compendious View of the Original Dispensation established with Adam, and of the Mediatorial Dispensation established through Christ, pp.245ff.

9 "When applied to the Gospel, it [faith] means giving full credit to the Divine testimony concerning the person, character and atonement of Christ, and to the promise, that whosoever believeth on Him shall have everlasting life." Letters, Chiefly Practical and Consolatory, p.347.

10 "Such is the revelation of the union of justice and mercy in His sacrifice, and of the character of God as a righteous judge and a kind parent, that when understood and believed, it produces love to Him who has so loved us, and love to mankind for His sake. Now, as the sum of the law is love to God and our neighbour, it follows, that when we are thus influenced by faith in the atonement to the love of God and men, the divine law is put in our inward parts, and written in our hearts." Ibid., p.445.

11 Ibid., p.143.

- 12 Ibid.,p.322.Cf.Erskine's Salvation,p.viii.
- 13 Letter to Charles Stuart,1st February 1821.Letters I,p.34.
- 14 Principal Shairp's phrase.Reminiscences in Letters II,p.351.
- 15 Letters I,p.381.
- 16 Ibid.,p.382.
- 17 Ibid.,p.382.
- 18 Ibid.,p.382.
- 19 Ibid.,p.381.
- 20 Letter to Rachel Erskine,23rd June 1827.Ibid.,p.119.
- 21 Donald Campbell,Memorials of John McLeod Campbell,vol.I,p.8.
- 22 Oliphant,Life of Irving,vol.I,pp.142-3.

(vi) John Gambold and the "Essay on Faith".

- 1 Quoted Hanna,Memoirs of Chalmers,vol.II,p.463.
- 2 Quoted J.A.Froude,Life of Carlyle,p.121.
- 3 It contained Charles Leslie's Short and Easy Method with the Deists,Lord Lyttleton's Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St.Paul,Philip Doddridge's Evidences of Christianity,William Bates' Divinity of the Christian Religion,John Owen's Self-evidencing Light of Scripture,and Richard Baxter's Danger of Making Light of Christ.
- 4 Preface to The Christian's Defence Against Infidelity,in Introductory Essays to Select Christian Authors (vol.XIII of Chalmers' Select Works),pp.287,289,293.Chalmers made the point even more explicitly in 1836,in his On the Miraculous and Internal Evidences of the Christian Revelation and the Authority of its Records,vol.I,book 6,ch.8,pp.384-5: "There is nothing,however,which has contributed more to modify our views upon this subject than the question whereof we now treat [the connection between doctrines and miracles].Instead of holding all religion as suspended on the miraculous evidences,we see this evidence itself standing at the bar of an anterior principle and there waiting for its authentication.There is a previous natural religion on whose aid we call for the determination of this matter.It is an authority that we at one time should have utterly disregarded and contemned; but now hold it in higher reverence,since reflecting on the supremacy of conscience within us,we deem this to be the token of an ascendant principle of morality and truth in the universe around us."
- 5 See his Institutes of Theology,section entitled Subject Matter of Christianity,part 2,ch.VI.This chapter deals with the nature and source of saving faith.
- 6 The author of the DNB article on Gambold says that Erskine edited this new edition of Gambold's works.This seems unlikely.
- 7 Introductory Essay to the Works of John Gambold,p.xxiii.
- 8 Erskine says he knows "only one passage in Shakespeare which is directly and unequivocally Christian, and that occurs in Measure for Measure in the scene between Isabella and Angelo".Ibid.,p.xxiii.
- 9 Ibid.,p.xxiv.
- 10 Ibid.,pp.xii-xv.
- 11 Ibid.,p.xiii.In connection with the doctrines of free grace (ie.justification by faith alone in the crucified Christ alone),Erskine shows his high esteem for the Evangelical revival of the eighteenth century,in which Gambold and his own uncle, John Erskine,had taken part.Referring to the first of Gambold's sermons reprinted

- in the Select Works, Erskine notes that it "was preached at a time when the free grace of the Gospel was not much known in England" (the date was 1741). Ibid., p.xxiii.
- 12 The preface to Rutherford's Letters was the essay on Salvation written in 1816. Erskine's edition of Gambold was received warmly by the Edinburgh Christian Instructor, which referred to his preface as "an excellent introductory essay". Edinburgh Christian Instructor, vol.XXII, December 1823, p.839. John McLeod Campbell liked Gambold, referring to him as "dear Gambold" in a letter to Robert Story, 22nd December 1827. Memorials of John McLeod Campbell, vol.I, p.47. He quotes from Gambold on pp.63 and 163 in his Reminiscences, and on p.110 of his Nature of the Atonement. Robert Story was attracted to the Collins edition of Gambold by Erskine's preface, and read it with approval in the summer of 1827.
 - 13 Robert Sandeman (1718-71) was son-in-law of John Glas, founder of the Glassites.
 - 14 Essay on Faith, p.27. I am using the slightly expanded 1823 edition.
 - 15 Ibid., p.26.
 - 16 On the Predestination of the Saints, ch.5.
 - 17 "We hold faith to be a knowledge of God's will toward us, perceived from His Word." "Faith is a knowledge of the divine benevolence towards us and a sure persuasion of its truth." Institutes, III:6, 12.
 - 18 For John Erskine, see his Nature of Christian Faith, reprinted in John Brown's Theological Tracts, vol.II. For Chalmers, see note 5 of this section. For James Haldane, see his Letters to a Friend: Containing Strictures on a Recent Publication upon Primitive Christianity by Mr. John Walker, pp.11-12, where Haldane praises Glas and Sandeman for their doctrine of faith: "Glas and Sandeman boldly opposed the popular doctrine. They vindicated the freeness of the grace of God, affirming that faith is simply the belief of the truth..." (p.12). For John Campbell (the missionary, philanthropist and Congregationalist minister, not to be confused with John McLeod Campbell), see Robert Philip's The Life, Times and Missionary Enterprises of the Rev. John Campbell, ch.5. For David Russell, see his Letters, Chiefly Practical and Consolatory, pp.254-5, 347ff. For Ralph Wardlaw, see his Systematic Theology, ch.XLII, XLIII. For John Brown, see his commentary on HEBREWS, ch.11. J.S.Candlish's remark is pertinent: "The intellectual view of faith was, indeed, prevalent at that time, and earlier, in Scotland; and no other idea of it seems to have occurred to Thomas Erskine. Not to speak of the Sandemanians, it was maintained by his uncle, the celebrated Dr. John Erskine, and by Dr. Chalmers." British and Foreign Evangelical Review, vol.XXII, no.83, January 1873, p.113.
 - 19 Essay on Faith, pp.56-7.
 - 20 Ibid., p.57.
 - 21 Ibid., p.57.
 - 22 Ibid., p.67. Cf. pp.90-1: "The Gospel is suited to man. He has affections and principles corresponding to every address contained in it, although from corruption and habitual misdirection, they may be, to a great degree, unmoved by these addresses. There is, however, no other way of regenerating these misdirected affections, but by bringing them in contact with their proper objects."
 - 23 Ibid., p.149.
 - 24 Ibid., pp.80-1.
 - 25 Candlish, art.cit., p.115.
 - 26 Robertson, A Vindication of the Religion of the Land, p.7.
 - 27 Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine, August 1828, p.531.
 - 28 Ibid., p.544.
 - 29 Ibid., pp.539-40.

30 Ibid.,p.535.

31 Ibid.,p.536.

32 Ibid.,p.545.

(vii) Germany, France, Geneva and Adolphe Monod.

1 Letter to Christian, 9th September 1822. Letters I, p.40.

2 Letter to Captain and Mrs. Paterson, 9th October 1822. Ibid., pp.40-1.

3 Letter to Christian, 29th October 1824. Ibid., p.67.

4 Erskine's aesthetic proclivities were noted by Bishop Ewing. "He had a considerable and delicate taste in art, fostered by lengthened residences on the Continent; and he was a lover of music, or rather melody." Present Day Papers on Prominent Questions in Theology, Some Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, pp.8-9.

5 Jean Henri Merle d'Aubigne (1794-1872).

6 Frederic Monod (1794-1863).

7 Francois Samuel Louis Gaussen (1790-1863).

8 Cesar Henri Abraham Malan (1787-1864).

9 Letter to Charles Stuart, 2nd November 1822. Letters I, p.41.

10 Letter to Chalmers, 12th December 1822. Ibid., p.43.

11 Ibid., p.43.

12 Ibid., pp.43-4.

13 Ibid., p.44.

14 Ibid., p.44

15 Ibid., p.44.

16 Erskine appears to reject reprobation. Ibid., p.44. This is another indication of the mildness of his Calvinism.

17 Ibid., p.44.

18 Letter to Charles Stuart, 10th March 1823. Ibid., p.46.

19 Ibid., p.47.

20 Ibid., pp.47-8.

21 According to Sir Charles Anderson. Quoted in Newsome, The Parting of Friends, p.425, note 9. Erskine's own description of Malan agrees with this: "there is something most apostolical in his whole deportment, and his mode of instruction I think in general very scriptural. His ministry has been much honoured by God. Wherever he goes an impression is made. I think his fault as a theologian is that he is too fond of dialectical language." Letter to Charles Stuart, 31st March 1823. Letters I, pp.48-9.

22 This is not to imply that only moral government theologians accepted this distinction, but that they were particularly fond of it. Erskine maintained it strongly in later editions of the Remarks: "Man's inability to obey God consists absolutely in his unwillingness, and is but another name for the greatest degree of this. There is nothing to prevent him from embracing the Gospel and walking in the ways of holiness but his own opposite inclination." 1821 ed., p.158. It appears also in his Essay on Faith: "Man in his depravity, has all the faculties which a child of God has, in this life. And he has a natural ability to use these faculties as he will. The inability, therefore, of a polluted creature to receive an impression of holy love, is not a natural inability; if he would, he could; his inability is moral, it lies in the opposition of his will

and affections, and this is his crime" (p.56). David Russell made much of this distinction between natural and moral inability. See his Compendious View of the Original Dispensation established with Adam, and of the Mediatorial Dispensation established through Christ, pp.172ff.

23 Letter to Charles Stuart, 31st March 1823. Letters I, p.49.

24 Ibid., p.48.

25 Letter to Davie, 24th July 1823. Ibid., p.51.

26 Ibid., p.51.

27 Ibid., p.51.

28 Ibid., p.52.

29 Ibid., p.51.

30 Ibid., p.52.

31 Letter to Christian, 9th September 1823. Ibid., p.53.

32 Ibid., p.53.

33 Adolphe Louis Frederic Theodore Monod (1802-56).

34 Life and Letters of Adolphe Monod, pp.12-13.

35 Ibid., p.20. The description of Erskine as "young" is slightly odd, since by 1824 Erskine was nearly thirty-five.

(viii) Italy and Richard Baxter.

1 Letter to Davie, 10th November 1823. Letters I, pp.54-5.

2 Letter to Christian, February 1824. Ibid., p.56.

3 Ibid., p.56.

4 Letter to Charles Stuart, 19th April 1824. Ibid., p.58.

5 Letter to Charles Stuart, 27th June 1824. Ibid., p.61.

6 Letter to Charles Stuart, 19th April 1824. Ibid., p.58.

7 Letter to Christian, 25th February 1824. Ibid., p.57.

8 Letter to Charles Stuart, 19th April 1824. Ibid., p.58.

9 Ibid., p.59. However, he was captivated (aesthetically) by the Vatican. When Christian visited Rome in October 1824 Erskine exhorted her to "go to the Vatican as often as you can, and...expand your spirit in St. Peter's. There also [as well as in Raphael's art], there is an eternity - and a different world from that which is without, and a different climate. And the splendid mosaics, and the tall beckoning silent figures of the saints and martyrs, and the light and the air which play so freely through it." Letter to Christian, 27th October 1824. Ibid., p.66.

10 The only Puritan authors Erskine was familiar with, to judge by references in his writings, were Baxter himself, John Bunyan, Archbishop Leighton, John Milton and Jonathan Edwards.

11 Introductory Essay to the Saints' Everlasting Rest, pp.v, vi, ix. To this tribute we may add Erskine's admiration for Oliver Cromwell, expressed to Thomas Carlyle while he was preparing his celebrated edition of Cromwell's letters and speeches: "He was a grand fellow, and full of good English domestic life, I am persuaded, of which no man could require a better proof than his calling up one of the maids of his house, whom he knew to be a Quaker, and telling her that George Fox was in town, for he had met him that day." Letter to Carlyle, 24th November 1841. Letters II, p.21.

12 Erskine,op.cit.,p.ix.

13 Ibid.,p.x.

14 Ibid.,p.xi.

15 Baxter was a Neonomian of sorts,holding that good works have a place in the obtaining of eternal life for the believer.

16 Erskine,op.cit.,p.xiv.

17 Ibid.,p.xv.

(ix) Interlude: Chalmers, Charles Stuart and A.J.Scott.

1 Letter to Mr.Montagu,11th August 1825.Letters I,p.170.

2 Henderson,Erskine of Linlathen,p.124.

3 Letters I,pp.68-9.Chalmers replied to Erskine in a letter dated 10th May,in which he expatiated on the subject of Bible distribution in Ireland.Hanna,Memoirs of Chalmers,vol.III,p.328,footnote.

4 Hanna,op.cit.,vol.III,pp.80-1,footnote.

5 Chalmers is known to have espoused the "gap theory",viz.that there was an indefinitely long time gap between verses one and two of GENESIS chapter 1,so that the six days of creation are really describing not the initial creation of the world but its reconstitution after some cosmic catastrophe.Erskine's views on this are not on record.

6 Letter to Davie,24th July 1823.Letters I,p.52.

7 Letter to Christian,9th September 1823.Ibid.,p.53.

8 Letter to Charles Stuart,18th August 1824.Ibid.,p.63.

9 Letter to Christian,29th October 1824.Ibid.,p.67.

10 Journal,4th July 1825.Hanna,op.cit.,vol.III,p.85.

11 Journal,5th July 1825.Ibid.,p.85.

12 Journal,8th July 1825.Ibid.,p.87.

13 Journal,16th July 1825.Ibid.,p.88.

14 Journal,14th December 1825.Ibid.,p.99.

14a Contrasting Scottish and English Evangelicals unfavourably in respect of personal religion,Chalmers said: "We Scotch speak about it - look at the matter intellectually - come forth with our didactic speculations about the thing; but the evangelical English clergy,as far as I can observe,possess the thing,and possessing it they have by far the most effective ingredient of good preaching,which is the personal piety of the preacher himself." Ibid.,vol.II,p.364,footnote.

15 Letter to Chalmers,22nd November 1825.Letters I,pp.71-2.

16 Letter to Miss Stuart,14th June 1826.Ibid.,p.73.

17 Letter to Charles Stuart,August 1822.Ibid.,p.37.

18 Letter to Charles Stuart,27th June 1824.Ibid.,p.63.

19 Erskine wrote ten letters to Stuart,as compared with seven to Chalmers,eight to his sister Christian,and four to his other sister Davie.

20 He derived his agnomen from his private estate in Dunearn,Fifeshire.

21 Philip,The Life,Times and Missionary Enterprises of the Rev.John Campbell,p.212.

22 The Autobiography of William Jay,p.138.

- 23 Haldane, Lives of the Haldanes, p.352.
- 24 Ibid., p.140.
- 25 Matheson, Memoir of Greville Ewing, p.86.
- 26 Newton has left us a rather negative portrait of Stuart in a letter to John Campbell:
"I am surprised that my friend Dr.Stuart's peculiarities should have made such an impression on you.You know the genius of the gospel, and that the kingdom of God does not consist in meats,drinks,or external punctilios.The doctor might have been a star of the first magnitude,if he could have kept his station at Cramond.What a pity that such a light should be shut up under a bushel; and that one who had tasted the kernel should waste so much of his time about the shell.He is still a good man, but he has shrunk the sphere of his usefulness,comparatively,to the size of a button. I trust that henceforth you will be shot-proof against all that he can say on his favourite but dry subject [baptism!].It seems he charges us who differ from him,with acting against our consciences.Is he then absolutely infallible? Pope Self will not say so much; but he acts as if he thought so." Philip,op.cit.,p.360.
- 27 Haldane,op.cit.,p.331; Matheson,op.cit.,p.86.
- 28 Philip,op.cit.,pp.154-6,212ff,360.
- 29 McCrie,Life of Thomas McCrie,pp.200ff.
- 30 Hanna,op.cit.,vol.I,p.370 and footnote.
- 31 Stuart,A Short Memoir of the late Mr.Andrew Fuller,p.1.
- 32 Ibid.,p.29.
- 33 Ibid.,p.10.
- 34 First published in 1773 when Stuart was minister of Cramond.
- 35 Stuart,The Present State of Human Nature according to the Word of God,p.5.
- 36 Haldane,op.cit.,p.140.
- 37 McCrie,op.cit.,p.201.
- 38 Ibid.,p.200.
- 39 James Stuart (1775-1849).See DNB article.
- 40 Letter to Miss Christian Erskine,12th April 1827.Letters I,p.108.
- 41 Details from P.Newell,A.J.Scott and his Circle,Ph.D thesis,Edinburgh 1981.
- 42 Ibid.,p.17.
- 43 Letter to Mrs.A.J.Scott,18th January 1866.Letters II,pp.181-2.
- 44 Letter to McLeod Campbell,17th January 1866.Ibid.,p.181.
- 45 Letter to Christian,13th October 1838.Letters I,p.331.B.B.Warfield came to a different conclusion about Scott's mental powers,describing him as "an impracticable probationer of the Church of Scotland,whose strong and acute but indocile and wilful mind imposed upon everyone whom he met an over-estimate of his intellectual ability." Counterfeit Miracles,p.136.
- 46 Letter to Bishop Ewing,19th January 1866.Present Day Papers on Prominent Questions in Theology,Some Further Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen,p.26.
- (x) Italy again: Edward Irving,William Law and Adolphe Monod.
- 1 Letter to Rachel Erskine,3rd November 1826.Letters I,p.83.This quotation actually refers not to Italy but to Brigue in southern Switzerland.
- 2 Letter to Rachel Erskine,6th April 1827.Ibid.,p.106.

- 3 Letter to Rachel Erskine, 10th November 1826. Ibid., p.90.
- 4 Letter to Christian, February 1827. Ibid., p.100.
- 5 Letter to Rachel Erskine, 2nd May 1827. Ibid., p.113. Erskine's love of art here led him to approve a direct violation of the Second Commandment.
- 6 Letter to Rachel Erskine, 13th March 1827. Ibid., pp.101-2.
- 7 The French argument as stated by Malan ran thus: "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. You acknowledge that. Is He the Christ? Have you any doubt? You are sure He is? or do you mean to say you do not believe that he is? But if you tell me that you do believe that He is, how can you doubt your safety? Would you make God a liar? for He says that 'everyone who believes is born of God.'" Brooke, Life and Letters of F.W. Robertson, p.40.
- 8 Edinburgh Christian Instructor, vol. XXVI, September 1827, p.629. Among the three divines Anti-Gallicus mentions, we have already encountered Sandeman. Crisp is Tobias Crisp (1600-43), an English Puritan suspected in his lifetime of Antinomianism; Barclay is John Barclay (1734-98), founder of the Scottish sect of the Bereans, of whom more later.
- 9 Letter to Mrs. Montagu, 13th July 1826. Letters I, pp.75-6.
- 10 See Edinburgh Christian Instructor, vol. XXVII, March 1828, pp.198-207; May, pp.337-8; August, pp.550-3; October, pp.657-64; November, pp.729-36; vol. XXVIII, June 1829, pp.395-401; etc.
- 11 See Murray, The Puritan Hope, pp.187-206.
- 12 Letter to Chalmers, 19th April 1827. Letters I, p.110. However, he expresses reservations about Irving's confident spirit: "I am a little surprised that the fate of former interpreters has not warned him. He is scarcely meek enough. He seems to intend to brave and insult such of his readers as hesitate about yielding their entire consent..." Ibid..
- 13 Letter to Christian Erskine, 12th April 1827. Ibid., p.109. Irving interpreted the signs of the times as indicating Christ's return in forty years from his time of writing.
- 14 Erskine's antagonism to Romanism was expressed more forcibly in his second continental trip. He witnessed a Roman Catholic religious procession in Brigue, and commented, "It is a woful business... These mummeries are so little like intercourse with the God of holy love, and that is our God and Father." Letter to Rachel Erskine, 5th November 1826. Ibid., p.86. In Venice he spoke to the city's patriarch: "He is most unbigoted, and I have caught myself often speaking to him about the foolish idolatries of his Church, as if he had been a Protestant." Letter to Rachel Erskine, 6th January 1827. Ibid., p.96. From Rome he wrote to Chalmers: "I am quietly looking upon the seat of the Beast, and wondering at him, at the manner of his existence, and at his duration... I have never yet seen a Catholic who was deeply spiritually-minded. I have not found any in the style of a Kempis; they are formalists even when they are honest believers, which is not a very usual thing among the tolerably educated classes, and never at all in France. The functions of the holy week are just over, and such a mummary to be sure! and then the celebration of Easter by an illumination! The existence of such a system, ecclesiastical and political, is a fact as unaccountable, or more so, than the continued separate preservation of the Jews..." Letter to Chalmers, 19th April 1827. Ibid., p.111.
- 15 Letter to Mr. Montagu, 11th August 1825. Ibid., p.70.
- 16 Letter to Chalmers, 19th April 1827. Ibid., p.111.
- 17 Letter to Rachel Erskine, 2nd May 1827. Ibid., p.112.
- 18 Letter to Rachel Erskine, 3rd May 1827. Ibid., pp.114-15.

- 19 Letter to Rachel Erskine, 10th November 1827. Ibid., pp. 123-4.
- 20 Law's sentiments on eternity were as follows: "Man has an eternity within him, is born into this world, not for the sake of living here, not for anything this world can give him, but only to have time and place to become either an eternal partaker of a divine life with God, or to have a hellish eternity among fallen angels." Spirit of Prayer, p. 5. Law's italics. In regard to retribution, Law denies that any of the miseries consequent upon the fall are due to "vindictive wrath in God, calling for justice to His offended sovereignty, and inflicting pains and punishments suitable to the greatness of His just indignation and anger at the disobedient creature." Ibid., p. 19.
- 21 Ibid., pp. 32, 38. Law's italics.
- 22 Ibid., p. 35. Law's italics.
- 23 Ibid., p. 45. Law's italics.
- 24 Ibid., p. 22.
- 25 The Spiritual Order, p. 258.
- 26 Robertson, A Vindication of the Religion of the Land, p. 128. H. F. Henderson also notes the relationship between Erskine and Law: "Erskine's writings bear the mark of William Law more perhaps than that of any other writer." Erskine of Linlathen, p. 26.
- 27 Letter to Rachel Erskine, 2nd January 1827. Letters I, p. 92.
- 28 Letter to Rachel Erskine, 6th April 1827. Ibid., pp. 105-6.
- 29 Letter to Bishop Colenso. Letters II, p. 212.
- 30 Letter to Donald Campbell, 17th December 1870. Donald Campbell, Memorials of John McLeod Campbell, vol. II, p. 294. Bishop Ewing's reminiscences also point to the lateness of Erskine's definite adoption of Universalism: "No doubt his mind... was greatly occupied in later years with the doctrine, as it is called, of 'Eternal Punishment', and he came to hold very decided opinions against that doctrine: its belief, as he held, involving a denial of the power and goodness of God Himself; placing a limitation, as he conceived, on the infinite extent of either." Present Day Papers on Prominent Questions in Theology, Some Further Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, p. 7.
- 31 Life and Letters of Adolphe Monod, p. 49.
- 32 Ibid., p. 51.
- 33 Ibid., p. 40.
- 34 Ibid., pp. 365-6.

CHAPTER III. "THE UNCONDITIONAL FREENESS OF THE GOSPEL", 1828.

(i) "The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel".

- 1 Letter to Chalmers, 10th November 1827. Letters I, p. 124.
- 2 Matheson, Memoir of Greville Ewing, p. 514.
- 3 Freeness, p. 44.
- 4 Ibid., pp. 61-2.
- 5 Ibid., pp. 18-19.
- 6 Ibid., pp. 28-9.
- 7 Ibid., p. 37.

- 8 Ibid.,p.58.
- 9 Ibid.,p.47.Erskine's italics and capitals.
- 10 Ibid.,p.51.
- 11 Ibid.,p.54.
- 12 Ibid.,p.61.
- 13 Ibid.,p.62.
- 14 Ibid.,pp.21-3.
- 15 Ibid.,p.17.
- 16 Ibid.,p.122.
- 17 Ibid.,p.45.
- 18 Ibid.,pp.118-19.
- 19 Ibid.,p.17.
- 20 Ibid.,pp.38-9.
- 21 Ibid.,pp.11-13.
- 22 Ibid.,p.48.In the second edition Erskine altered "the punishment of sin" to "the natural effect of sin": a very clear sign of the anti-forensic drift of his thought.
- 23 Ibid.,pp.50-2.
- 24 For example,in our analysis of the Remarks.See chapter II,section (iii).
- 25 Freeness,p.52.
- 26 Ibid.,pp.120-1.
- 27 Ibid.,pp.150-1.
- 28 Gill,Body of Divinity,p.148.Emphasis supplied.A writer to the Edinburgh Christian Instructor remarked on the similarity of Erskine and his followers to hyper-Calvinists in their theology of justification,among other things.Instructor,vol. XXIX,May 1830,pp.316-9.The most distinctive feature of hyper-Calvinism,however - its denial that all men should be called upon to believe in Christ as their Saviour, since He died only for the elect - would have been abhorrent to Erskine.
- 29 Eg.in his introductory essays to the works of Gambold,and Baxter's Saints' Everlasting Rest.
- 30 Freeness,p.49.
- 31 Ibid.,p.45.
- 32 Ibid.,p.27.
- 33 Ibid.,pp.62-3.
- 34 Ibid.,pp.16-17.
- 35 Ibid.,p.18.
- 36 Ibid.,p.24.
- 37 Ibid.,p.53.
- 38 Ibid.,p.221.
- 39 Ibid.,pp.102-3.
- 40 Ibid.,p.209.
- 41 Erskine goes as far as to say that,"The Bible never speaks of God being reconciled,

but only as reconciling..." Ibid.,p.172.But this is another area in which he contradicts himself,since on p.42 he speaks of "a propitiated God",and on p.43 he says, "The access to God propitiated was open." If God was propitiated,ie.His anger removed, manifestly He was reconciled.

42 Ibid.,pp.82-6.

43 Thomson remarked concerning the first paragraph we have quoted from p.82 of the Freeness: "I consider the following as a piece of as raving mysticism as I ever met with...He is in danger of believing himself an emanation of the Supreme Being - of mixing himself up with the Divine essence - of mistaking himself for a portion of the Divinity." The Doctrine of Universal Pardon Considered and Refuted,pp.485-6. Erskine certainly expresses an unusually sharp sense of the immanence of God and the absolute dependence of created things on His moment-by-moment sustaining power, and his language may in places be injudicious,but Thomson's strictures seem hypercritical.

44 Freeness,pp.199-201.

45 Ibid.,p.69.

46 Ibid.,pp.80-1.

(ii) Reactions to the "Freeness": the periodicals.

1 Edinburgh Christian Instructor,vol.XXVII,June 1828,pp.410-11.

2 Ibid.,p.411.

3 Ibid.,p.412.

4 Freeness,p.11.

5 Edinburgh Christian Instructor,ut supra,p.413.

6 Ibid.,p.414.

7 Ibid.,p.417.

8 Ibid.,p.425.

9 Ibid.,p.418.

10 Ibid.,p.419.

11 Ibid.,p.419.

12 Ibid.,p.419.

13 Ibid.,p.424.

14 Ibid.,pp.424-6.

15 Life and Letters of Adoplhe Monod,p.49.

16 Edinburgh Christian Instructor,ut supra,p.427.

17 Evangelical Magazine,vol.VI,November 1828,p.481.

18 Ibid.,p.482.

19 Ibid.,pp.482-3.

20 Ibid.,p.484.

21 Ibid.,p.483.

22 Ibid.,p.484.

23 Eclectic Review,vol.XXX,December 1828,p.523.

24 Ibid.,p.523.

- 25 Ibid.,p.524.
- 26 Ibid.,p.524.
- 27 Ibid.,p.524.
- 28 Ibid.,p.523.
- 29 British Critic,vol.V,January 1829,pp.54-7.
- 30 Ibid.,p.70.
- 31 Ibid.,p.59.
- 32 Ibid.,p.60.
- 33 Ibid.,p.62.
- 34 Ibid.,p.64.
- 35 Ibid.,pp.66-7.
- 36 Ibid.,p.67.
- 37 Ibid.,p.78.
- 38 Ibid.,p.76.
- 39 Christian Guardian,January 1829,p.32.
- 40 Ibid.,p.32.
- 41 Ibid.,p.32.
- 42 Life and Letters of Adolphe Monod,p.51.
- 43 Freeness,p.8.
- 44 Christian Guardian,January 1829,p.33.
- 45 Ibid.,p.33.
- 46 Ibid.,p.34.
- 47 Ibid.,p.34.
- 48 Ibid.,p.34.
- 49 Christian Observer,vol.XXIX,February 1829,p.108.
- 50 Ibid.,pp.108-9.
- 51 Ibid.,p.109.
- 52 Ibid.,p.109.
- 53 Ibid.,pp.111-12.
- 54 Ibid.,p.112.
- 55 Ibid.,p.111.
- 56 Ibid.,p.112.

(iii) Reactions to the "Freeness": Buchanan, Nettleton, Wardlaw and Chalmers.

- 1 Letter to Thomas Erskine, Esq. Advocate,p.3.
- 2 Ibid.,p.3.
- 3 Ibid.,p.6.
- 4 Ibid.,p.8.

- 5 Ibid.,p.9.
- 6 Ibid.,p.10.
- 7 Ibid.,pp.10-11.
- 8 Ibid.,p.15.
- 9 Ibid.,p.15.
- 10 Ibid.,pp.17-18.
- 11 Ibid.,p.19.
- 12 Ibid.,p.21.
- 13 Ibid.,p.22.
- 14 Ibid.,p.8,footnote.
- 15 Ibid.,pp.22-3.
- 16 Tyler and Bonar,Nettleton and his Labours,pp.380,382-3.
- 17 See the letters columns in the Instructor from September 1827 right through to February 1830.
- 18 See Haldane's Observations on Universal Pardon,the Extent of the Atonement,and Personal Assurance of Salvation,pp.89-91.
- 19 Alexander,Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Ralph Wardlaw,p.275.
- 20 Hanna,Memoirs of Chalmers,vol.III,pp.245-7.
- 21 Chalmers,Institutes of Theology,vol.II,p.403.
- 22 Ibid.,p.404.
- 23 Ibid.,p.404.
- 24 Ibid.,p.408.
- 25 Ibid.,p.409.
- 26 Ibid.,pp.410-11.
- 27 Ibid.,p.411.
- 28 Ibid.,p.406.
- 29 Ibid.,p.95.
- 30 Ibid.,p.95.
- 31 Ibid.,p.154.
- 32 Ibid.,p.153.
- 33 Ibid.,p.156.
- 34 Ibid.,p.163.
- 35 Ibid.,p.250.
- 36 Ibid.,pp.439-40.
- 37 Works of Thomas Chalmers,vol.VIII,p.232.
- 38 Ibid.,pp.233-4.
- 39 Ibid.,pp.247-8.
- 40 Ibid.,vol.IX,p.95.
- 41 Ibid.,p.97.

42 Ibid.,p.110.

43 Ibid.,p.124.

44 Ibid.,vol.X,p.82.

45 Ibid.,pp.99-100.

46 Hanna,A Selection from the Correspondence of the late Thomas Chalmers,p.318.

47 Hanna,Memoirs of Chalmers,vol.IV,p.512.

48 Ibid.,p.773.

CHAPTER IV. THE ROW CONTROVERSY, 1828-31.

(i) Opening thrusts: Erskine, Campbell, Scott and Irving.

- 1 Letters I,p.129.Erskine arrived back in Scotland from the continent in November 1827.The Freeness was published in early 1828.If Campbell met Erskine in 1827, therefore,it could only have been just before the publication of the Freeness. Hanna says that,"If not before,it must have been immediately after" the publication of the Freeness that Erskine and Campbell first came in contact.Ibid.,p.129.
- 2 Donald Campbell,Memorials of John McLeod Campbell,vol.I,p.62.Hanna says that Erskine's "personal acquaintance" with Campbell did not commence till Erskine visited Row in summer 1828.Letters I,p.129.This contradicts Campbell's account, for he affirms that it was A.J.Scott who took him to see Erskine,and that this might have happened in 1827.I prefer to follow Campbell as the primary source; and if Scott took Campbell to Erskine,this must surely have occurred before Erskine went to Campbell in summer 1828.It is reasonable to suppose that this meeting took place soon after Erskine heard Campbell preach in Edinburgh (for which see next paragraph in main text).It is worth noting at this point that Campbell did already have a literary acquaintance with Erskine,having read his Remarks.He mentions this in a letter to his father,dated February 1826,in which he praises the connection Erskine makes between doctrine and ethics.Donald Campbell,op.cit.,vol.I,p.27.But to return to Hanna's evidence: he also asserts that Erskine's friendship with Scott commenced in 1828,although he says in a footnote that they first met in 1826. This too seems inconsistent with Campbell's version,wherein Campbell avows that Scott took him to Erskine because he knew that the theology of Campbell and Erskine coincided.This would have been unlikely if Scott was not already friendly with Erskine.
- 3 Letters I,p.129.
- 4 Letter to Chalmers,19th July 1828.Letters I,p.141.
- 5 Ibid.,p.141.
- 6 Duncan Finlayson,Aspects of the Life and Influence of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, 1788-1870,in Scottish Church History Society,vol.XX,p.42.Finlayson also notes that after Erskine's expulsion from Russell's congregation,he made premises available in Broughty-Ferry for the establishment of an Episcopalian church (St.Mary's,Broughty-Ferry).
- 7 Hanna,Letters I,p.383; Newell,A.J.Scott and his Circle,p.33.
- 8 Freeness,pp.131ff.His source was Luther's Commentary on Galatians,with a biographical sketch by Erasmus Middleton.According to Middleton,Luther derived spiritual benefit from being told that God commanded every man to believe that his sins were forgiven.
- 9 Thomson,The Doctrine of Universal Pardon Considered and Refuted,pp.449-51.Thomson candidly admitted that Luther believed in universal atonement,but denied that he believed in universal pardon,as Erskine claimed,and produced seven quotations from Luther's Galatians to prove it.

- 10 See chapter III, section (iii).
- 11 See section (v) of this chapter.
- 12 Edinburgh Christian Instructor, vol. XXIX, May 1830, p. 332.
- 13 Donald Campbell, op.cit., vol. I, pp. 51-2.
- 14 Oliphant, Life of Irving, vol. II, p. 25.
- 15 Ibid., p. 20.
- 16 Ibid., p. 25.
- 17 Ibid., p. 25.
- 18 Ibid., p. 26.
- 19 Ibid., p. 27.
- 20 Ibid., p. 126.
- 21 Donald Campbell, op.cit., vol. I, pp. 53-4.
- 22 Oliphant, op.cit., vol. II, p. 48.
- 23 Irving's Works, vol. V, p. 187.
- 24 Ibid., p. 239.
- 25 Ibid., p. 375.
- 26 Ibid., pp. 180, 385.
- 27 Letter to Rachel Erskine, 6th September 1828. Letters I, p. 143.
- 28 Letter to Mrs. Montagu, 27th November 1828. Ibid., pp. 147-8.
- 29 R.L. Dabney, God's Indiscriminate Proposals of Mercy, as related to His Power, Wisdom and Sincerity, in Discussions, vol. I, pp. 282-313. The Christological argument is on pp. 308-9.
- 30 Letter to Rachel Erskine, 26th December 1828. Letters I, pp. 148-50.
- 31 See chapter II, section (v).

(ii) Gathering pace: the Christology of Irving.

- 1 Campbell, Reminiscences and Reflections, p. 29.
- 2 Ibid., p. 30.
- 3 Donald Campbell, Memorials of John McLeod Campbell, vol. I, pp. 64-5.
- 4 Notes and Recollections of Two Sermons by the Rev. Mr. Campbell; delivered in the parish church of Row, on Sunday, 6th September 1829, p. 30.
- 5 Donald Campbell, op.cit., pp. 66-7.
- 6 Story, Memoir of R. Story, pp. 113-17.
- 7 Ibid., p. 130.
- 8 Letter to Mrs. Montagu, 13th July 1826. Letters I, p. 76.
- 9 Campbell, Reminiscences and Reflections, p. 30.
- 10 Ibid., p. 31.
- 11 Letter to the Rev. Thomas Wright Matthews, 23rd January 1829. Letters II, p. 389.
- 12 Letter to Mr. and Mrs. Money, 23rd January 1829. Ibid., pp. 387-8.
- 13 Letter to Madame de Stael, 4th September 1829. Letters I, p. 161.

- 14 Hanna, Memoirs of Chalmers, vol.IV, p.5.
- 15 Letter to Rachel Erskine, 11th March 1829. Letters I, p.151.
- 16 Keble, The Christian Year, Monday before Easter.
- 17 Faber, Oxford Apostles, p.98.
- 18 Church, The Oxford Movement 1833-1845, p.25.
- 19 Letter to Rachel Erskine, May 1829. Letters I, p.153.
- 20 Robertson, A Vindication of the Religion of the Land, p.155.
- 21 Ibid., p.149.
- 22 Ibid., pp.164-5, note.
- 23 Letter to Rachel Erskine, July 1829. Letters I, pp.156-7.
- 24 Letter to F.D.Maurice, 15th November 1860. Letters II, pp.134-5.
- 25 For Campbell, see Donald Campbell, op.cit., vol.I, p.75. For Scott, see Oliphant, op.cit., vol.II, p.123. For Robert Story, see Story, op.cit., p.189.
- 26 Quoted Dallimore, Life of Irving, pp.78-9.
- 27 Irving, The Doctrine of the Incarnation Opened, in Sermons, Lectures and Occasional Discourses, vol.I, p.140, xix-xx.
- 28 Ibid., p.140, xvii.
- 29 Irving, Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of our Lord's Human Nature, p.49.
- 30 Irving, The Doctrine of the Incarnation Opened, p.140, xxxix.
- 31 Irving, Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of our Lord's Human Nature, p.x.
- 32 Ibid., p.x.
- 33 Isaac Dorner, in his discussion of Irving's Christology, criticised Irving's separation of the sinless Person of God the Son from the sinful nature He assumed, as having Nestorian and Pelagian tendencies: "According to this teaching, involuntary evil inclinations are not sinful, an ethical estimate simply attaches to the acts of freedom. Further, the relation between the Logos and Jesus is in this case thought in a manner so loose and external, that the Unio would be degraded to something essentially inoperative and idle. And this is a Nestorian characteristic. On the other hand, sinful human nature would certainly have a merely external relation to the human person of Christ. The latter is supposed, indeed, to have had the task of giving new birth to something by which the Person did not become sinful. But if in Jesus the sinfulness of nature does not belong to the Person, this must also be true of us, and innate sinfulness does not belong to the person, which would be a Pelagian characteristic..." System of Christian Doctrine, vol.III, p.362.
- 34 Irving, Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of our Lord's Human Nature, pp.25-6.
- 35 Irving, The Doctrine of the Incarnation Opened, p.140, xvii.
- 36 Irving, Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of our Lord's Human Nature, p.vii.
- 37 See, for example, John Owen's exposition in his Epistle to the Hebrews.
- 38 Coleridge, Notebook 39, ff.20^v-21. Quoted J.R.Barth, Coleridge and Christian Doctrine, p.133.
- 39 Coleridge, Tabletalk, p.278.
- 40 Ibid., p.278. Coleridge here glances at the question whether Christ was able not to sin (*posse non peccare*) or not able to sin (*non posse peccare*). It is not entirely clear whether he is ascribing the former to Christ's human nature only, or to His

complex personality as God-Man. To ascribe peccability to Christ's human nature but not to His theanthropic personality is a course followed by some adherents of the "non posse peccare", such as W.G.T. Shedd. See his Dogmatic Theology, vol. II, pp. 330ff.

- 41 Oliphant, Life of Irving, vol. II, p. 79.
- 42 Haldane, Refutation of the Heretical Doctrine Promulgated by the Rev. Edward Irving respecting the Person and Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, p. 24.
- 43 Thomson, Sermons on Various Subjects, note C, p. 544.
- 44 Ibid., note A, p. 524.
- 45 Story, op. cit., p. 113.
- 46 Letter to a clerical friend, 1829. Letters I, p. 159. The month of writing is not given, but the location is Row Cottage, Helensburgh.
- 47 Ibid., p. 158.
- 48 Ibid., pp. 158-9.
- 49 Letter to Madame de Stael, 4th September 1829. Ibid., p. 161.
- 50 Letter to Chalmers, 20th October 1829. Ibid., pp. 168-9.
- 51 J.S. Candlish, Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, in British and Foreign Evangelical Review, vol. XXII, no. 83, January 1873, p. 116.
- 52 Campbell, Reminiscences and Reflections, p. 31.
- 53 Tulloch, Movements of Religious Thought in Britain during the Nineteenth Century, pp. 153-4.
- 54 Story, op. cit., p. 156.
- 55 Ibid., p. 151.
- 56 Oliphant, op. cit., p. 105.

(iii) Evangelicalism assaulted.

- 1 Letter to unknown correspondent, 15th January 1830. Letters I, pp. 286-8.
- 2 Irving, Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of our Lord's Human Nature, p. 142.
- 3 Edinburgh Christian Instructor, vol. XXIX, January 1830, p. 3.
- 4 Letter to Rachel Erskine, 1st February 1830. Letters I, pp. 169-70.
- 5 Letter to James Stirling, 1st February 1830. Ibid., p. 171.
- 6 Footnote, ibid., p. 171.
- 7 Letter to Christian, 21st March 1830. Ibid., p. 172.
- 8 Extracts, p. lxix.
- 9 Ibid., p. lxix.
- 10 Ibid., pp. xlvi-xlvii.
- 11 Ibid., p. lxix.
- 12 Ibid., p. xv.
- 13 Ibid., p. xvi.
- 14 Ibid., p. lx.
- 15 Westminster Confession 9:I.
- 16 Extracts, pp. xxxi-xxxii.

17 Ibid.,pp.vii-viii.

18 Ibid.,pp.xxiff.

19 For a brief outline of Fraser's views,see Walker,Theology and Theologians of Scotland, pp.80-3.

(iv) The charismatic movement.

1 Story,Memoir of R.Story,pp.194-5.

2 Oliphant,Life of Irving,vol.II,pp.129-30.

3 Story,op.cit.,p.210.

4 Norton,Memoirs of James and George MacDonald of Port Glasgow,pp.59-60.

5 Ibid.,pp.58-9; Story,op.cit.,p.205.

6 Story,op.cit.,p.206; Hanna,Letters I,p.177.

7 Norton,op.cit.,p.111.

8 Ibid.,p.111.

9 Newell,A.J.Scott and his Circle,p.79.

10 Norton,op.cit.,p.112.This is an index of the eschatological mood of the times.Even the sober Thomas Arnold interpreted the appearance of the tongues in a similar way: "If the thing be real I should take it merely as a sign of the coming of the Lord - the only use,as far as I can make out,that ever was derived from the gift of tongues... However,whether this be a real sign or no,I believe that 'the day of the Lord' is coming,i.e. the termination of one of the great $\alpha\omega$ ves of the human race; whether the final one of all or not,that I believe no created being knows or can know." Stanley, Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold,vol.I,pp.250-1.

11 Story,op.cit.,p.231.

12 Robertson,A Vindication of the Religion of the Land,p.311.

13 Story,op.cit.,p.211.

14 Ibid.,p.209.

15 Newell,op.cit.,pp.78-9.Campbell's letter is dated 28th April 1830.

16 Norton,op.cit.,p.166.

17 Haldane,Lives of the Haldanes,p.532.

18 Edinburgh Christian Instructor,vol.XXIX,July 1830,p.504.

19 Thomson,The Doctrine of Universal Pardon Considered and Refuted,p.246.

20 Hanna,Memoirs of Chalmers,vol.III,p.272.

21 Newell,op.cit.,p.93.

22 Letter to Captain Paterson,15th October 1830.Letters I,pp.186-7.

23 Gifts of the Spirit,p.3.

24 Ibid.,pp.13-14.

25 Ibid.,pp.16,20.

26 Ibid.,pp.10-11.Erskine's interpretation of I COR.13:8-10 is the normal pentecostal-charismatic interpretation.It is not however very plausible,since Paul's point is not to prove that any spiritual gift will be permanent in this world,but that the very nature of all such gifts precludes their existence in the world to come.Paul's aim is to persuade the Corinthians to put less emphasis on the spiritual gifts,by spot-

lighting their imperfect nature. The modes of knowledge of God involved in tongues, prophecy and the gift of wisdom, are all such as to give incomplete knowledge. In the life to come, Paul argues, we will know God fully, see Him face-to-face; but the kind of knowledge mediated by the charismata is fragmentary, like seeing in a mirror dimly. Thus when the perfection of the next world comes, all imperfect modes of divine knowledge will cease; there will be no place in heaven for tongues or prophecy. But love will continue in the afterlife; love is eternal and therefore more important than these transient, imperfect gifts. Paul's argument does not require that any particular one of the imperfect modes of divine knowledge must continue to operate until the last day. That is not the intention of his argument, which is simply to underscore the imperfection of present modes of divine knowledge. Pointing to tongues and prophecy, Paul says: "Things like this will have no place in the perfection of heaven. But love will; therefore pursue love, as being more heavenly."

We can construct the following analogy. Paul might have wished to downgrade the importance of medicine by pointing to the perfect health believers will enjoy in the resurrection. Regarding the primitive medical techniques of the first century, he might have said: "All these things can give but partial and transient health, for we must all die. But when the perfection of the resurrection body comes, these things will no longer be needed; they will have no place in the new heavens and new earth. Therefore do not put so much value on them." Such an argument would be quite valid, but it would not imply that the particular medical techniques of the first century would continue in use right up to the Second Coming. It would merely mean that all techniques of that sort are imperfect, and no imperfect techniques will be needed when perfection comes.

27 Ibid., p.5.

28 Ibid., p.5.

29 Ibid., p.6.

30 Ibid., p.19.

31 Ibid., p.20.

32 Ibid., p.21.

33 Ibid., p.21.

34 Ibid., p.23.

35 Life and Letters of Adolphe Monod, p.51.

36 Hanna, op.cit., vol.III, p.272.

37 Campbell later claimed that he had never accepted the charismata: "I have never received the so-called 'manifestations of the Spirit' in the church which is connected with Mr. Irving's name, as being in reality what they claim to be. But this, not because I did not believe that such gifts as were in the church at the beginning might be restored to us, but because I had no positive ground for believing that these were such gifts; while the teaching with which they were connected, and to which they seemed to put a seal, was to me positive evidence against the assumption of their divine origin." Letter to Bishop Ewing, 30th October 1866. Donald Campbell, Memorials of John McLeod Campbell, vol.II, pp.153-4. The "teaching" to which Campbell refers here is the development of the authoritarianism and ecclesiasticism of the Catholic Apostolic Church. See chapter V, section (i).

38 Campbell, The Everlasting Gospel, p.29.

39 Story, op.cit., p.223.

40 Ibid., p.219.

41 Ibid., p.227.

- 42 Newell,op.cit.,p.92.
- 43 Story,op.cit.,p.202.
- 44 Newell,op.cit.,p.92.
- 45 Oliphant,op.cit.,vol.II,p.107.
- 46 Dallimore,Life of Irving,p.109.
- 47 Newell,op.cit.,p.99.
- 48 Hanna,Letters I,p.132.
- 49 Story,op.cit.,p.155.Campbell himself felt that the process against him was unconstitutional.Reminiscences and Reflections,pp.33-4.
- 50 Campbell,Notes of a Sermon Preached in the Parish Church of Row on Thursday 8th July 1830,pp.23,25.
- 51 Story,op.cit.,p.156.
- 52 Letter to Rachel Erskine,16th July 1830.Letters I,p.174.
- 53 Ibid.,p.174.
- 54 Story,op.cit.,Appendix III,p.396.
- 55 Ibid.,p.397.Campbell's italics.
- 56 Ibid.,p.397.
- 57 Ibid.,p.397.
- 58 Ibid.,p.397.
- 59 Ibid.,p.394.
- 60 Ibid.,p.394.
- 61 Campbell argued that the fifth beatitude,"Blessed are the merciful,for they shall receive mercy" (MATT.5:7),referred to the reception of God's mercy on the last day, not during the present life.For on that day God will judge men according to their own moral characters,and "God's favour will be limited to those who are like Him". The last judgment will not be on the basis of a man's being in Christ by faith,but on the basis of personal holiness.Notes of a Sermon Preached in the Parish Church of Row on Thursday 8th July 1830,p.13.
- 62 Henderson,The Religious Controversies of Scotland,p.175.Campbell,in other words, insisted that the fact that sinful men were not yet in hell was a blessing procured by the atonement.This,coupled with the universal invitation of the gospel,he described as a state of "pardon".Scottish theology had traditionally denied that man's present condition of non-damnation was a fruit of the atonement,ascribing it rather to God's sovereignty.See Walker,Theology and Theologians of Scotland,pp.83-6.
- 63 Story,op.cit.,Appendix III,pp.401-5.
- 64 Quoted Hanna,Letters I,p.138.
- 65 Donald Campbell,op.cit.,vol.I,p.72.
- 66 Ibid.,p.73.
- 67 Campbell,Reminiscences and Reflections,pp.34-5.
- 68 Ibid.,p.34.

(v) The controversial literature of 1830.

- 1 Campbell,The Nature of the Atonement,4th ed.,Edgar P.Dickie's introduction,p.xx.
- 2 Campbell,Responsibility for the gift of eternal life,No.1.JER.6:14,p.15.
- 3 Edinburgh Christian Instructor,vol.XXIX,May 1830,p.349.
- 4 Article Samuel Lee in DNB,vol.XXXII,p.820.
- 5 Quoted Robertson,A Vindication of the Religion of the Land,p.290.
- 6 Ibid.,p.290.
- 7 Ibid.,p.284..
- 8 Ibid.,p.285.
- 9 Scott,On the Divine Will,p.13.
- 10 Ibid.,p.13.
- 11 Ibid.,pp.19-20.
- 12 Ibid.,p.21.
- 13 Ibid.,p.16.
- 14 Quoted Story,Memoir of R.Story,p.130.Story's son tells us that his father "read assiduously all that bore upon it [viz.assurance] in the Fathers - in the writings of the Reformers,Continental and English,with which his acquaintance was intimate and extensive; and from his reading he made copious extracts,apparently with some (subsequently abandoned) intention of writing a treatise on the subject." Ibid.,pp.98-99.This was circa 1826.If Story did abandon his intention,the Extracts on Faith from the Writings of the Reformers was obviously not written by him but by some other Rowite connoisseur of the Reformers.
- 15 Extracts on Faith,p.17.
- 16 Irving,Works,vol.V,p.500.
- 17 Ibid.,pp.460-4.
- 18 Ibid.,p.465.
- 19 Ibid.,p.454.
- 20 Ibid.,p.476.
- 21 Andrew Thomson,the Instructor's editor,entitled a four-page anti-Rowite letter,"Information and warning to the Erskinites".This title ran across the top of the magazine page for all four pages of the letter.Edinburgh Christian Instructor,vol.XXIX,May 1830,pp.316-19.In the September issue of the following year,a lengthy letter from "Verus" attacked the "Erskinites".Ibid.,vol.XXX,September 1831,pp.610-16.
- 22 Letters and Dialogues between Theron,Paulinus and Aspasio,on the nature of Love to God,Faith in Christ,and Assurance of Salvation.By Joseph Bellamy.Introductory Essay by Robert Burns,pp.viii,xviii.
- 23 Eclectic Review,July 1830,pp.62,76.
- 24 Thomson,The Doctrine of Universal Pardon Considered and Refuted,pp.viii,463.
- 25 Ibid.,p.9.
- 26 Hamilton,An Essay on the Assurance of Salvation,pp.iii,iv.
- 27 Exposure of Certain Errors Put Forth in "Notes and Recollections of Two Sermons by the Rev.Mr.Campbell of Row,pp.4,8.
- 28 Ibid.,p.15.

- 29 Smyth, A Treatise on the Forgiveness of Sins as the Privilege of the Redeemed; in opposition to the doctrine of universal pardon, p.50. In Anniversary and Other Discourses.
- 30 Robertson, op.cit., p.248.
- 31 Ibid., p.250. Fernicarry, it will be recalled, was the home of Mary Campbell.
- 31a Craig, A Letter to Thomas Erskine, Esq., p.39.
- 32 Edinburgh Christian Instructor, vol. XXIX, November 1830, p.771.
- 33 Exposure of Certain Errors, p.11.
- 34 From the title of a work by Robert Burns of Paisley, The Gairloch Heresy Tried. The loch's name could be spelt both "Gareloch" and "Gairloch". The former seems to be the spelling which has prevailed.
- 35 Hamilton, Remarks on Certain Opinions Recently Propagated, Respecting Universal Redemption, pp. v, vi.
- 36 Ibid., p.157.
- 37 Ibid., p.62.
- 38 Thomson, op.cit., pp.200, 258.
- 39 Smyth, op.cit., p.53.
- 40 Ibid., p.52.
- 41 Ibid., p.140.
- 42 Hamilton, Universal Redemption, pp.22, 97, 117, 130, 149; Assurance of Salvation, p.vii.
- 43 Burns, Introductory Essay to Letters and Dialogues, p.x. The editor of Ralph Wardlaw's Systematic Theology, published in 1856, also identified Erskine with the Bereans. After referring to Erskine's Remarks on the Internal Evidence for the Truth of Revealed Religion, he says: "Mr. E. subsequently adopted views respecting universal pardon and the assurance of faith, identical in the latter point with those of the sect called Bereans in Scotland, of which the ablest expounder was John Barclay, A.M., whose works in 3 vols. were published in Edinburgh in 1776." Wardlaw, Systematic Theology, vol. I, p.487, footnote 2.
- 44 Barclay, The Assurance of Faith Vindicated, from the Misrepresentations of Sandeman and Cudworth, p.41.
- 45 Ibid., p.10.
- 46 Alexander, Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Ralph Wardlaw, p.285.
- 47 Ibid., p.285.
- 48 Burns, The Gairloch Heresy Tried, p.50.
- 49 For Joanna Southcott, John Ward and John Wroe, see their respective entries in DNB. Robertson makes the connection in op.cit., p.127; Craig makes it in op.cit., p.37.
- 50 Eclectic Review, November 1830, p.417.
- 51 Edinburgh Christian Instructor, vol. XXIX, July 1830, p.502.
- 52 Ibid., pp.502-3.
- 53 Ibid., vol. XXIX, May 1830, p.352.
- 54 Craig, op.cit., p.24; Robertson, op.cit., p.171.
- 55 Thomson, op.cit., pp.431, 465.
- 56 Ibid., p.463.
- 57 Ibid., p.viii.

- 58 Ibid.,p.392.
- 59 Ibid.,p.471.
- 60 Ibid.,p.374.
- 61 Ibid.,pp.405-6.
- 62 Ibid.,p.463.
- 63 Ibid.,p.404.It is only fair to Thomson to point out that his attitude to Erskine and the Rowites in general was not wholly,if predominantly,negative.He was willing to concede that the Rowite leaders were sincerely pious men.But he insisted that one could be pious whilst entertaining doctrinal error,instancing Emmanuel Swedenborg and devout Romanists as clear examples.Ibid.,pp.269ff.
- 64 Wardlaw,Two Essays: (1) On the Assurance of Faith (2) On the Extent of the Atonement and Universal Pardon,pp.86-8,126-7.
- 65 Ibid.,pp.74-5.
- 66 Ibid.,p.vii.
- 67 Ibid.,p.247.
- 68 Ibid.,p.xvi.
- 69 Ibid.,p.324.
- 70 Newsome,The Parting of Friends,pp.5-6.
- 71 Dods,On The Incarnation of the Eternal Word,pp.26-7.
- 72 Campbell,Responsibility for the gift of eternal life,No.8.LK.2:8-11,p.26.
- 73 Irving,Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of our Lord's Human Nature,p.141.
- 74 Coleridge,Aids to Reflection,p.200,note 1.
- 75 Drummond and Bulloch,The Scottish Church 1688-1843,p.215.
- 76 Ibid.,p.216.
- 77 John MacLeod's phrase.Scottish Theology in Relation to Church History,p.259.
- 78 Robertson,op.cit.,p.26.
- 79 Hamilton,Universal Redemption,p.157.
- 80 Smyth,op.cit.,pp.116,128.
- 81 Burns,The Gairloch Heresy Tried,p.39.
- 82 Thomson,op.cit.,pp.306-7.
- 83 Ibid.,p.295.Emphasis supplied.
- 84 Ibid.,pp.289ff.
- 85 More profoundly,I would criticise the Rowite theology for failing to think together God's justice and love dynamically.It would be an unjust act for God to punish a sinless creature; that is,putting it positively,God's justice will prompt Him to act only for the good of the sinless - that is,to act benevolently towards them - that is,to love them.The relationship of justice and love is thus seen to be a complex which assumes a particular form with regard to the sinless.This form is different with regard to the sinful: here justice calls for punishment,deprivation of good,withdrawal of love (in treatment,not feeling).But it is still an option for God,as an act of free sovereign discretion,to exercise His love toward the sinful in the provision of a Substitute to bear their just punishment vicariously.
- 86 Wardlaw,Two Essays,pp.203-4.

- 24 Ibid.,pp.238-9.
- 25 Ibid.,pp.209-13.
- 26 Ibid.,p.197.
- 27 Ibid.,p.191.
- 28 Ibid.,p.180.
- 29 Ibid.,p.205.
- 30 Ibid.,p.24.
- 31 Ibid.,p.28.
- 32 Ibid.,p.28.

(vii) Triumph and disaster.

- 1 Hanna,Memoirs of Chalmers,vol.III,p.292.
- 2 Donald Campbell,Memorials of John McLeod Campbell,vol.I,p.76.
- 3 Ibid.,p.76.
- 4 Ibid.,p.78.That of which Chalmers was not likely to be a member (and wasn't) was the General Assembly of 1831.
- 5 Story,Memoir of R.Story,p.166.
- 6 Haldane's criticism of moral government theology is on p.67 of his treatise.
- 7 Haldane,Observations on Universal Pardon,the Extent of the Atonement,and Personal Assurance of Salvation,p.4.
- 8 Ibid.,pp.28,66-7.
- 9 Campbell,Speech before the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr,pp.37-52.
- 10 Ibid.,p.54.
- 11 Ibid.,p.54.
- 12 Ibid.,p.54.See also p.18.
- 13 Ibid.,pp.5-6.
- 14 Ibid.,p.55.
- 15 Story,op.cit.,p.169.
- 16 Miller,History and Doctrines Of Irvingism,vol.I,p.66.
- 17 Newell,A.J.Scott and his Circle,p.123.
- 18 Story,op.cit.,p.174.
- 19 Ibid.,p.178.
- 20 Hanna,Letters I,p.137.
- 21 Story,op.cit.,p.176.
- 22 Newell,"Unworthy of the dignity of the Assembly": the deposition of Alexander John Scott in 1831,in Records of Scottish Church History Society,vol.XXI,part 3 (1983), p.256.
- 23 Story,op.cit.,p.189.
- 24 Ibid.,p.189.
- 25 Newell,art.cit.,p.257.
- 26 Mrs.Oliphant says that MacLean was merely sent back to his local presbytery to be

87 Ibid.,pp.312-13.

88 Ibid.,p.318.

(vi) The Brazen Serpent.

1 Hanna,Letters I,p.139.

2 Struthers,History of the Rise,Progress and Principles of the Relief Church,p.451.

3 Brazen Serpent,pp.36-7.

4 Ibid.,p.88.

5 Ibid.,p.71.

6 Ibid.,p.103.

7 Ibid.,p.133.

8 Ibid.,p.41.

9 Ibid.,p.44.It is true that Erskine says that "punishment in this present dispensation is sent as a blessing" (p.41,emphasis supplied),and that his implication is that punishment in the hereafter is no longer a blessing but a curse.But it must be remembered that the punishment of the hereafter - hell - has in Erskine's view come into being only in relation to the gospel.Present sufferings and physical death are for Erskine the sole punishment of the general sinfulness of mankind,and this punishment he denies to be retributive.Retribution comes on the stage only when men reject God's provision in the gospel for enabling them rightly to experience the penalties of the present life.In other words,if only God had not decided to bless men with the gospel, none of His punishments would be retributive! This seems absurd,and it is no surprise that Erskine abandoned it for Universalism.His very insistence on the reformatory and beneficial character of all punishment in the present life (including the event of death itself) points clearly in a Universalist direction.For he has,so to speak, relegated divine justice to the next world,so that it has no practical relevance in man's experience of God in this world.It is not difficult to imagine how the mentality induced towards God by such a belief could prompt the believer to expunge from God's character altogether anything which was not beneficent and reformatory towards the sinner.

10 Ibid.,pp.42-3.

11 Ibid.,pp.39-40.

12 Ibid.,p.43.

13 Ibid.,p.35.

14 Ibid.,pp.47,49.

15 Irving,Works,vol.V,p.270.

16 Ibid.,p.160.

17 Brazen Serpent,p.62.

18 Ibid.,p.107.

19 Ibid.,p.171.

20 Ibid.,pp.229,231.

21 Ibid.,p.188.

22 Ibid.,p.203.

23 Ibid.,p.192.

dealt with by it (Life of Irving, vol. II, p. 178). R.H. Story and Hanna both state that the Assembly itself deprived Maclean of his licence (Story, op.cit., p. 186; Hanna, Memoirs of Chalmers, vol. III, p. 290). The records of the General Assembly's acts for 1831 show that Story and Hanna are right. Maclean was deposed on Wednesday 25th May.

27 Oliphant, op.cit., vol. II, p. 178.

28 Story, op.cit., p. 172.

29 Story, The Church of Scotland, vol. III, p. 771.

30 Quoted in Ewing, Present Day Papers on Prominent Questions in Theology, Some Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, p. 16.

31 Eclectic Review, November 1830, p. 417.

32 Edinburgh Christian Instructor, vol. XXIX, July 1830, p. 504.

33 Thomson, The Doctrine of Universal Pardon Considered and Refuted, p. 246.

34 Story, Memoir of R. Story, p. 175, note.

35 Hanna, Memoirs of Chalmers, vol. III, p. 291.

36 Ibid., p. 291.

37 Story, Memoir of R. Story, pp. 175-6.

38 Oliphant, op.cit., vol. II, pp. 119-20.

39 Tulloch, Movements of Religious Thought in Britain during the Nineteenth Century, p. 162.

40 Burleigh, A Church History of Scotland, p. 333.

41 Drummond and Bulloch, The Scottish Church 1688-1843, p. 106.

42 Henderson, The Religious Controversies of Scotland, p. 144.

43 Hanna, A Selection from the Correspondence of the late Thomas Chalmers, p. 318.

44 Chalmers, Institutes of Theology, vol. II, p. 404.

CHAPTER V. THE AFTERMATH, 1831-37.

(i) The Catholic Apostolic Church: from faith to disillusion.

1 Principal Shairp's reminiscences in Letters II, pp. 361-2.

2 Letter to Mr. and Mrs. MacNabb, 29th December 1842. Ibid., p. 34.

3 Hanna, Letters I, p. 383.

4 Oliphant, Life of Irving, vol. II, pp. 187-8.

5 Miller, History and Doctrines of Irvingism, vol. I, p. 67.

6 Ibid., pp. 68-9.

7 Carus, Memoirs of the Life of the Rev. Charles Simeon, pp. 484-6.

8 Oliphant, op.cit., vol. II, p. 261.

9 Letter to Christian, May 1832. Letters I, p. 188.

10 Ibid., p. 188.

11 Letter to Chalmers, May 1832. Ibid., p. 189.

12 Ibid., p. 190.

13 Letter to Christian, May 1832. Ibid., p. 188.

14 Ibid., pp. 191-2.

- 15 Letter to Rachel Erskine, 3rd November 1826. Ibid., p.84.
- 16 Hanna, ibid., p.288.
- 17 Letter to Gaussen, December 1832. Ibid., pp.288-9.
- 18 Letter to Mr. Montagu, 11th November 1832. Ibid., pp.278-80.
- 19 Quoted Strachan, The Pentecostal Theology of Edward Irving, p.196.
- 20 Oliphant, op.cit., vol.II, p.348.
- 21 Ibid., p.348.
- 22 Norton, Memoirs of James and George MacDonald of Port Glasgow, p.186.
- 23 Letter to Lady Elgin, 18th March 1834. Letters I, pp.209-10.
- 24 Letter to Rachel Erskine, 21st December 1833. Ibid., pp.204-6.
- 25 Letter to Mrs. MacNabb, 23rd January 1834. Ibid., pp.206-7.
- 26 Donald Campbell, Memorials of John McLeod Campbell, vol.I, p.115.
- 27 Letter to Lady Elgin, 18th March 1834. Letters I, p.208.
- 28 Ibid., p.212.
- 29 Ibid., pp.210-11.
- 30 Letter to Lady Elgin, undated (between March and April 1833). Ibid., pp.194-5.
- 31 Letter to Christian, 5th April 1834. Ibid., p.217.
- 32 Norton, op.cit., p.211.
- 33 Ibid., pp.216-7.
- 34 Ibid., p.217.
- 35 Reported by Erskine in a letter to Rachel Erskine, 11th April 1834. Letters I, p.220.
- 36 Letter to Christian, 5th April 1834. Ibid., p.218.
- 37 Letter to William Tait, 16th October 1834. Ibid., pp.225-9.
- 38 Letter to Irving. Ibid., p.231.
- 39 This ironic fact is recorded by Oliphant, op.cit., vol.II, p.374, and Miller, op.cit., vol.I, p.144.
- 40 Oliphant, op.cit., vol.II, p.402.
- 41 Letter to Miss Stuart, 13th December 1834. Letters I, p.232.
- 42 Quoted in Donald Campbell, op.cit., vol.I, p.126.
- 43 Letter to Rachel Erskine, 6th February 1835. Letters I, p.233.
- 44 Ibid., p.233.
- 45 Letter to Christian, 5th April 1834. Ibid., pp.216-7.
- 46 The Doctrine of Election, pp.571-2. Erskine expressed similar sentiments much later in a letter to McLeod Campbell dated 1st October 1862: "I have been reading over the 12th, 13th, and 14th of 1st Corinthians. It is a very remarkable passage. Paul seems to have been as much troubled by those manifestations as Irving was, and he seems to have escaped by seeing that they did not stand in that authoritative place that Irving ascribed to them. The 19th verse of the 14th chapter gives me the same impression that I used to receive from a comparison of the Row teaching with the Port Glasgow manifestations thirty-two years ago. He, Paul, seems really to have set little store comparatively by the manifestations in the Corinthian Church." Letters II, pp.142-3.

(ii) Domestic ills and solitude at Cadder.

- 1 Letter to A.J.Scott, 21st April 1837. Letters I, pp.252-3.
- 2 Letter to Christian, 23rd June 1837. Ibid., pp.254-5.
- 3 Letter to Campbell, 14th March 1836. Ibid., p.238.
- 4 Letter to Mrs. Machar, 29th March 1836. Ibid., pp.239-40.
- 5 Letter to James MacKenzie, 2nd January 1837. Ibid., p.247.
- 6 Ibid., p.248.
- 7 Letter to A.J.Scott, 21st April 1837. Ibid., p.253.
- 8 Letter to Christian, 12th January 1837. Ibid., p.249.
- 9 Letter to James MacKenzie, 2nd January 1837. Ibid., pp.249-50. The other reference is in a letter to Christian, December 1836. Ibid., pp.246-7.
- 10 Letter to Christian, 19th January 1838. Ibid., p.299.
- 11 Ibid., p.299.
- 12 For Smith, see letter to Christian, December 1836, and another dated 12th January 1837. Ibid., pp.247, 249. For More, see letter to A.J.Scott, 3rd August 1837. Ibid., pp.256-7.
- 13 Letter to A.J.Scott, 3rd August 1837. Ibid., p.256.
- 14 Ibid., p.256.
- 15 Letter to Lady Elgin, 18th March 1834. Ibid., pp.210-11.
- 16 Letter to A.J.Scott, 21st April 1837. Ibid., pp.253-4.
- 17 Plato, Gorgias (Penguin edition), pp.66-7, 73.
- 18 Ewing, Present Day Papers on Prominent Questions in Theology, Some Further Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, p.50.
- 19 Letter to F.J.A.Hort, 5th March 1850. Letters II, p.37.
- 20 Prof. J.Lorimer, letter to William Hanna, 20th February 1877. Ibid., p.333.
- 21 Quoted ibid., p.111, footnote.
- 22 Letter to John Young, 18th February 1867. Ibid., p.248.
- 23 The Spiritual Order, pp.115-17.
- 24 Letter to A.J.Scott, 21st April 1837. Letters I, p.254. He also appears to have read John Chrysostom, to judge by a reference in a letter to Christian, 12th January 1837. Ibid., p.249.
- 25 Maurice, Prophets and Kings of the Old Testament, p.ix.
- 26 Letter to Erskine, 21st December 1852. Letters II, p.150.
- 27 Letter to Priscilla Maurice, late January or early February 1831. Maurice, The Life of F.D.Maurice, vol.I, p.121.
- 28 Letter to Miss G.Hare, 30th March 1849. Ibid., vol.I, p.533.
- 29 Letter to Christian, 19th January 1838. Letters I, p.300.
- 30 Letter to Maurice, 20th November 1854. Letters II, p.90.
- 31 Letter to A.J.Scott, 21st April 1837. Letters I, p.252.
- 32 Christensen, The Divine Order: A Study in F.D.Maurice's Theology, p.212.
- 33 Ibid., p.297. Principal Tulloch compared Maurice with the Cambridge Platonists. Movements of Religious Thought in Britain during the Nineteenth Century, pp.277-8.

- 34 For Sartor Resartus, see letters to Davie, 14th May 1838, and to Christian, 22nd May 1838. Letters I, pp. 305-6. For French Revolution, see letter to Christian, 22nd May 1838. Ibid., p. 307.
- 35 Letter to Mrs. Burnett, 4th February 1843. Letters II, p. 36.
- 36 Letter to Davie, 14th May 1838. Letters I, p. 305.
- 37 Froude, Life of Carlyle, p. 687, note 17.
- 38 Ibid., p. 687, note 17.
- 39 R. and E. Watson, George Gilfillan: Letters and Journals, with Memoir, p. 77.
- 40 Letter to Erskine, 11th February 1869. Letters II, p. 325.

(iii) "The Doctrine of Election".

- 1 Election, p. ix.
- 2 Ibid., pp. 2-3.
- 3 Ibid., pp. 3-4.
- 4 Ibid., pp. 4-5.
- 5 Ibid., p. 5.
- 6 Ibid., p. 8.
- 7 Ibid., p. 12.
- 8 It is strictly the supralapsarian rather than the merely Calvinistic view. Infralapsarian Calvinists would prefer to say that, humanity being fallen and considered in its fallen state, God has a right out of that fallen mass to make some sinners examples of His justice, and to elect others as trophies of His grace.
- 9 Election, p. 34.
- 10 Ibid., p. 35.
- 11 Ibid., p. 36.
- 12 My summary from ibid., pp. 393ff, esp. p. 409.
- 13 Ibid., pp. 408-9. The quotation about God's breach of promise is from NUM. 14:34.
- 14 Ibid., pp. 23-5.
- 15 Ibid., pp. 472-3.
- 16 Ibid., pp. 257ff.
- 17 Reid, The Influence, Direct and Indirect, of the Writings of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen on Religious Thought in Scotland, unpublished PhD thesis, Edinburgh 1930, p. 232.
- 18 Dodd thinks in regard to Paul's argument in ROM. 9:18ff that "his thought declines from its highest level"; Paul takes "a false step" into "an unethical determinism". The Epistle of Paul to the Romans, pp. 157-8. Barclay, after a fair exegesis of Paul's predestinarian doctrine, says: "Inevitably our minds stagger at this argument. It presents us with the picture of a God who apparently quite arbitrarily chooses one and rejects the other. To us it is not a valid argument..." The Letter to the Romans, p. 136. O'Neill's pithy comment on v. 18 is: "A thoroughly immoral doctrine." Paul's Letter to the Romans, p. 158. There is a refreshingly straightforward honesty in such comments, compared with Erskine's artful attempts to strip the chapter of its obvious offensive meaning.
- 19 Election, p. 256.
- 20 Ibid., p. 273.
- 21 Ibid., p. 258.

- 22 Ibid.,p.260.
- 23 Ibid.,pp.272-3.
- 24 Ibid.,p.271.
- 25 Ibid.,pp.276-7.
- 26 Ibid.,pp.279-80.
- 27 Ibid.,pp.281-2.
- 28 Ibid.,p.56.
- 29 Ibid.,p.61.
- 30 Wesley,Predestination Calmly Considered,p.447.In Outler,John Wesley.
- 31 Coleridge,Aids to Reflection,p.214.
- 32 Election,pp.39,40.
- 33 Ibid.,pp.144-5.
- 34 Ibid.,p.548.
- 35 Ibid.,p.550.
- 36 Ibid.,pp.552-3.
- 37 Ibid.,p.554.
- 38 Ibid.,pp.568-9.
- 39 Ibid.,p.368.
- 40 Ibid.,p.369.
- 41 Ibid.,p.xxii.
- 42 Ibid.,p.156.
- 43 Ibid.,pp.104-5,218-9,232-3.
- 44 Ibid.,pp.308-9.
- 45 Remarks,p.14.
- 46 Election,p.xxii.
- 47 Ibid.,pp.492-4.
- 48 Ibid.,pp.66-7.
- 49 Ibid.,p.114.
- 50 Ibid.,p.160.
- 51 Ibid.,pp.171-2.
- 52 Ibid.,pp.219-20.
- 53 Ibid.,pp.529-30.
- 54 Ibid.,p.x.
- 55 Ibid.,pp.xi-xii.Emphasis supplied.
- 56 Ibid.,pp.xvi-xvii.
- 57 Ibid.,p.xvii.
- 58 Ibid.,p.xiv.

(iv) On to Universalism.

- 1 1820 - the year in which the Remarks was published. Salvation, written earlier, was not published until 1825.
- 2 Shairp's reminiscences in Letters II, pp. 375-6.
- 3 Ibid., p. 186.
- 4 Ibid., pp. 192, 250.
- 5 Finlayson, Aspects of the Life and Influence of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, 1788-1870, in Records of Scottish Church History Society, vol. XX, pp. 41-2.
- 6 Letter to Bishop Ewing, 19th April 1866. Ewing, Present Day Papers on Prominent Questions in Theology, Some Further Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, pp. 30-1.
- 7 Letter to Mrs. Burnett, 4th February 1843. Letters II, p. 36.
- 8 Letter to Rachel Erskine, 15th August 1838. Letters I, p. 325.
- 9 Letter to Madame de Broglie, 13th August 1838. Ibid., pp. 323-4.
- 10 Letter to Christian, 3rd January 1839. Ibid., p. 343.
- 11 For Vinet, see article by R. J. Sandeman in 3rd series of The Evangelical Succession.
- 12 Letter to Rutherford, 24th January 1839. Letters I, p. 345.
- 13 Letter to Davie, 5th February 1839. Ibid., p. 346.
- 14 Letter to Captain Paterson, 21st March 1839. Ibid., p. 353.
- 15 Letter to Mr. Craig, undated. Letters II, pp. 239-40, 242. The second edition of Craig's tract was published in 1863, with Erskine's letter as a preface.
- 16 Letter to Rev. J. Young, February 1870. Ibid., p. 251.
- 17 Letter to Rev. J. Young, 1866. Ibid., pp. 246-7.
- 18 Henderson, Erskine of Linlathen, pp. 69-70.
- 19 Coleridge, Literary Remains, in vol. V of Shedd's edition of Coleridge, pp. 447-8. Quoted Barth, Coleridge and Christian Doctrine, p. 192.
- 20 Collected Letters, ed. Griggs, vol. III, p. 6. Quoted Barth, op. cit., p. 192.
- 21 Letter to Mrs. MacNabb, 4th March 1868, quoted in Letters II, p. 315.
- 22 Shairp's reminiscences in ibid., p. 364.
- 23 See note 6.
- 24 Letter to Donald Campbell, 11th March 1864. Letters II, p. 255.
- 25 Letter to Bishop Ewing, 1868. Ibid., p. 321.
- 26 Robertson, A Vindication of the Religion of the Land, p. 41.

APPENDICES.

APPENDIX I. RALPH WARDLAW'S COMPARATIVE EVALUATION OF CHALMERS' "EVIDENCE AND AUTHORITY OF THE CHRISTIAN REVELATION", AND ERSKINE'S "REMARKS ON THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE FOR THE TRUTH OF REVEALED RELIGION".

- 1 To be fair, Wardlaw did recognise that Chalmers later came to a more positive view of internal evidence. He says in a footnote: "Before going a step further, it is necessary for me to say, that this lecture was composed long before the publication of the recent and greatly altered and enlarged edition of Dr. Chalmers' Treatise on the 'Evidence and Authority of the Christian Revelation.' The quotations which follow are taken from that treatise in its previous state. In the recent edition of it, which, on certain points and

especially on the internal evidence, may be regarded as an entirely new treatise, the principles adopted are so different, as to indicate very strikingly a great general change in the mind of the eminent author. It is true that different editions of the treatise had been permitted by him to go through the press subsequently to the time of its first appearance in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*; and subsequently to the time when his views of Christianity had become more decidedly such as are known under the denomination of evangelical. But he appears, on subsequent and more mature examination, to have become convinced, that the views given in it on the subject of internal evidence were not in keeping with the loftier conceptions of the Gospel which he had subsequently and happily attained; and we now find him pleading, ably and largely, on some at least of the very grounds, which we had taken up against him. I have not deemed it necessary to re-model this lecture entirely, so as to bring it into harmony with Dr. C.'s present views." Wardlaw, Systematic Theology, vol. I, p. 485, footnote.

APPENDIX II. DAVID RUSSELL'S "LETTERS" AND ERSKINE'S "ESSAY ON FAITH": AN EXAMPLE OF DIRECT INFLUENCE.

- 1 Erskine, Essay on Faith, pp. 20-1.
- 2 Russell, Letters, Chiefly Practical and Consolatory, p. 354.
- 3 Erskine, op. cit., p. 122.
- 4 Russell, op. cit., p. 256.
- 5 Erskine, op. cit., pp. 44, 49.
- 6 Russell, op. cit., p. 256.
- 7 Erskine, op. cit., pp. 123-4.
- 8 Russell, op. cit., pp. 250-1.
- 9 Erskine, op. cit., p. 116. Erskine's Calvinism is evident here. But he does not clearly explain what he means by "the influence of the Spirit" apart from the presentation of truth to the mind. See p. 55.
- 10 Russell, op. cit., p. 504. On pp. 79-80 of the Essay on Faith, Erskine adopts the traditional anti-Calvinist translation of ACTS 13:48, reading "disposed" for "ordained". This shows the tendencies of his thought in 1822. But Russell espouses the same view on p. 520 of his Letters. It is therefore another likely instance of Erskine's dependence on Russell. One wonders whether Russell noticed this dependence. Erskine wanted Russell to read through the draft for the 4th edition of the Essay on Faith in mid-1824. See letter to Captain Paterson, 17th May 1824. Letters I, p. 61.
- 11 Eclectic Review, vol. XXIII, May 1825, p. 474.

APPENDIX III. ERSKINE'S UTTERANCES ABOUT HELL BETWEEN 1828 AND 1837.

- 1 Freeness, p. 234.
- 2 Ibid., pp. 176-7.
- 3 Ibid., pp. 206-7.
- 4 Extracts, p. xxxv.
- 5 Ibid., pp. xlvii-xlviii.
- 6 Gifts of the Spirit, pp. 23-4.
- 7 Brazen Serpent, p. 124.
- 8 Election, pp. 78-9.
- 9 Ibid., p. 145.

APPENDIX IV. THE EARLY THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF JOHN McLEOD CAMPBELL,
UP TO THE BEGINNING OF 1828.

- 1 Details from Campbell, Reminiscences and Reflections, and Donald Campbell, Memorials of John McLeod Campbell, vol. I.
- 2 Newman, Apologia Pro Vita Sua, p. 32.
- 3 Donald Campbell, op.cit., vol. II, p. 269.
- 4 Campbell, op.cit., p. 11.
- 5 Ibid., p. 11.
- 6 Ibid., pp. 11-12.
- 7 Ibid., pp. 132-3.
- 8 Ibid., p. 133.
- 9 Ibid., pp. 18-19.
- 10 Ibid., p. 133.
- 11 Ibid., pp. 133-4.
- 12 Ibid., p. 136.
- 13 Ibid., pp. 138-9.
- 14 Ibid., p. 148.
- 15 Ibid., p. 19.
- 16 Donald Campbell, op.cit., vol. I, p. 40.
- 17 Ibid., p. 40.
- 18 Ibid., p. 45.
- 19 Campbell, op.cit., p. 22.
- 20 Campbell came to rely intellectually on Scott to a significant extent. After Scott's death in 1866 Campbell came in contact with the new British Hegelian school of philosophers and theologians, did not know what to make of them, and wished that Scott were there to consult. "The one man to whom I would have gone with the deeper questions now moved, dear Scott, is no longer within my reach; and I now regret that I did not make a point of knowing more of the results at which he had arrived regarding German - now Oxford - thought. But latterly he was very reticent even to me." Donald Campbell, op.cit., vol. II, p. 158.
- 21 H.F. Henderson, Religious Controversies of Scotland, p. 178.
- 22 Newell, A.J. Scott and his Circle, pp. 38-9.
- 23 Ibid., pp. 38-9. He also considers that Scott's broadening views were "nurtured if not partly inspired by his study of Luther". Ibid., p. 63. The mention of Luther is interesting. Erskine quotes from Erasmus Middleton's Life of Luther and Luther's own preface to his Commentary on Galatians in the Freeness (pp. 131-4) to try to prove that Luther believed in the antecedence of pardon to faith. Chapter two of Campbell's Nature of the Atonement is entitled "Teaching of Luther", in which he quotes extensively from Luther's Commentary on Galatians; part II, chapter vi of his Reminiscences and Reflections is entitled "Faith as understood by Luther". All three of the Erskine-Campbell-Scott trio evidently felt themselves to be in the theological line of the German Reformer.
- 24 Letter to Rachel, 6th September 1828. Letters I, p. 143.
- 25 Letter to his youngest daughter, 26th March 1870. Donald Campbell, op.cit., vol. II, p. 273.

26 Campbell,Reminiscences and Reflections,p.20.

27 Ibid.,p.20.

28 Ibid.,pp.20-1.

29 Ibid.,p.24.

30 Ibid.,p.27.

31 Ibid.,p.154.

32 "I beseech you consider,that God the Father,as He is in His Son Jesus Christ,moved with nothing but His free love to mankind lost,hath made a deed of gift and grant unto them all,that whosoever of them all shall believe in this His Son,shall not perish,but have eternal life.And hence it was,that Jesus Christ Himself said unto His disciples,Mark xvi.5,'Go and preach the gospel to every creature under heaven': that is,Go and tell every man without exception,that here is good news for him; Christ is dead for him; and if he will take Him,and accept of His righteousness,he shall have Him." Marrow of Modern Divinity,with notes by the Rev.Thomas Boston,pp.126-7.

33 Campbell,Reminiscences and Reflections,pp.155-6.

34 Ibid.,p.156.

35 Ibid.,p.156.

36 Ibid.,pp.156-7.

APPENDIX V. THE HISTORICAL PEDIGREE OF EDWARD IRVING'S CHRISTOLOGY.

- 1 Irving's attitude: "Oh it relieveth my heart in the midst of these painful studies and deep meditations to find that I am fighting the battle which the apostle John began and which the holy fathers of the Church for seven centuries ceased not to wage." Doctrine of the Incarnation Opened,in Sermons,Lectures and Occasional Discourses,vol.I,p.140,cxxxvii.
- 2 Augustine,On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins,book II,ch.38 (xxiv).In Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,First Series,vol.V.
- 3 Augustine,Against Julian,IV:57.Quoted Marcus Dods,On the Incarnation of the Eternal Word,p.37.
- 4 John of Damascus,An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith,book III,ch.xx.In Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,Second Series,vol.IX.
- 5 Capitula of the Second Council of Constantinople,no.XII.In Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,Second Series,vol.XIV,p.315.
- 6 See Bruce,The Humiliation of Christ,pp.248ff; and Pelikan,The Christian Tradition,vol.III,pp.52-8.
- 7 Irving,Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of our Lord's Human Nature,p.79.
- 8 Ibid.,p.79.
- 9 Ibid.,p.66.
- 10 See chapter II,section (x).
- 11 Tucker,The Light of Nature Pursued,vol.II,pp.384-5.
- 12 Dods,op.cit.,p.335.
- 13 Haldane,Lives of Robert and James Haldane,p.529.
- 14 Ibid.,p.529.
- 15 For a discussion of these theologians,see Bruce,op.cit.,pp.250ff; and Ullmann,The Sinlessness of Jesus,p.126,footnote.

- 16 Roberts, The Slain Lamb, p.21. Quoted Sanders, Heresies and Cults, p.101.
- 17 Roberts, The Blood of Christ, p.26. Quoted Sanders, op.cit., pp.101-2.
- 18 Quoted Irvine, Heresies Exposed, p.77.
- 19 He mentions "above all" in this connection Gottfried Menken. Barth, Church Dogmatics I:2, p.154.
- 20 See Toon's The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity, 1689-1765, especially pp.43ff, and his article The Growth of a Supralapsarian Christology, in Evangelical Quarterly, vol.XXXIX, no.1, pp.23-9.
- 21 Irving, Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of our Lord's Human Nature, p.49.
- 22 Ibid., pp.56-7.

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